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Learning From Down Under
Volume 9
4
March 2009

At Home in the Modern World

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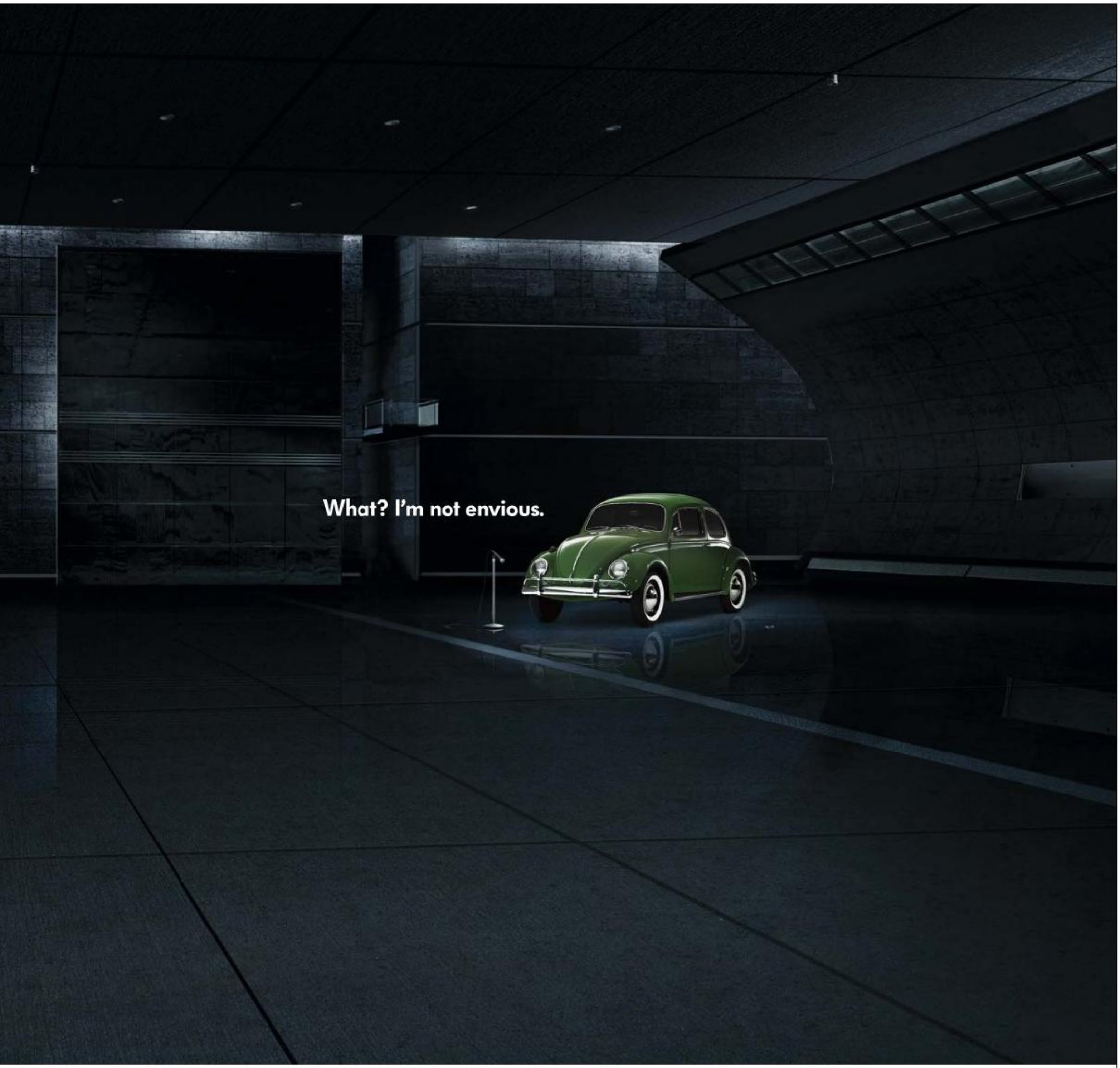
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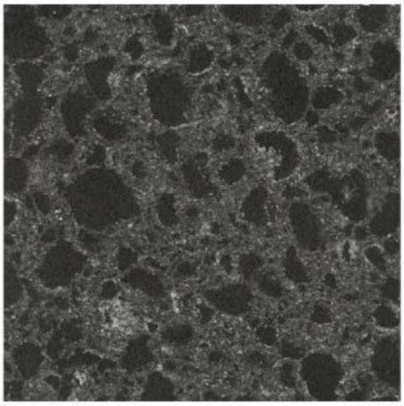


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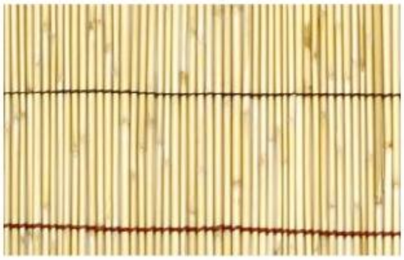


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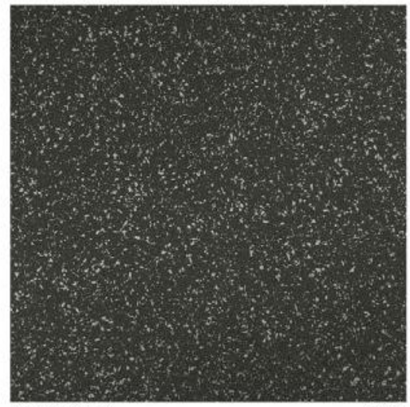












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Learning From Down Under

March 2009







Cover: Macleod-Bellemo Residence, Melbourne, Australia, page 53
Photo by Prue Ruscoe











53



33



66

"There's an old saying that a passive house needs an active occupant."

Tone Wheeler of Environa Studio







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Down Is Up

A few years ago I half jokingly suggested we dedicate an issue of Dwell to Australia. My colleagues chuckled and summarily moved on, but the idea stuck in my mind until now. Year in and year out, we have made a point of tracking down great projects from all over the United States, but categorically the homes that came to us from Down Under seemed to be in a different league altogether. How was it that these homes had fully integrated sustainable features light-years ahead of the curve? Were modestly scaled and unpretentious? Employed an original aesthetic language? And without fail, offered designs that were contextually relevant? Architects had once fled the country—the controversial story of Jørn Utzon and the Sydney Opera House comes to mind—but how things have changed.

Because my own knowledge of the place is largely based on *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*, and *Crocodile Dundee*, I turned to my Australian colleague Michael Sylvester for answers. After pointing out that, like much of the developed world, Australia has its fair share of suburban dreck, and that those expecting a Dwell Home on every corner would be sorely disappointed, he graciously and astutely offered the following five factors that have contributed to Australia's advanced domestic designs:

1. A demanding ecology

Australia is generally a very arid country. Water-usage restrictions are common in major cities. Average citizens in Sydney or Brisbane are very aware of rules concerning when and how they can wash their cars or water plants in their gardens. With these usage restrictions sustained, the mainstream discussion of the practical impacts of resource management feeds into broad awareness of issues of sustainability. These values carried into design schools. At architecture schools in the mid-1980s, many teachers were aggressively pushing the merits of passive solar design and resource efficiency—ideas born out of the 1970s energy crisis.

2. Mythic isolation

Australia was long thought to suffer from a "cultural cringe"—a form of inferiority complex developed in a colonial outpost. Australia never had a war for independence and struggled to forge a national identity. Being removed from the rest of the world geographically, some Australians developed a sense of inferiority while others cultivated a proud passion for building a unique identity. In the design world, the cultural cringe is dead and buried—Australians now feel proud that they have a unique design voice that is born of their time and place.

Much like the United States has the pioneering push westward as a facet of national identity, Australia has a mythic archetype of the hardy colonial farmer who came from comfortable Europe to discover an enormous land of challenges. Out in the "bush," pioneers worked hard in isolation and made a future with meager resources. Victory was predicated not on wealth but rather on beating the odds.

3. Pronounced egalitarianism

Australians believe in a "fair go" for everyone. Entitled elites or the pompous have little truck. This egalitarianism has led to a more socialist form of democracy and capitalism than is typical here in the United States. I would argue that it also caps ostentation in design. "Luxury" takes on humbler forms through craftsmanship rather than veneer.

4. Economic prosperity

Australians have an enviable standard of living. The country is well managed economically and has experienced a couple of decades of economic expansion—no silly dotcom bubbles or subprime lunacy. Unfettered greed that damages others is not tolerated. Prosperity is widespread, and there is a lot of money chasing good design.

5. Outdoor lifestyle

Australians love the outdoors. They love sports and recreation, particularly the beach. Look at the Olympics medal tally and adjust the medals per country by population and you will see that per capita Australia (population 20 million) wins by a mile (a *kilometre*, actually). We have very diverse climates but most people live in temperate zones that allow for year-round outdoor activity. When your average person enjoys and respects the environment, that respect is necessarily carried over into how one designs and treats the earth.

We also venture to New Zealand to explore its cache of creatively and sensitively designed houses. While New Zealanders face different climatic and contextual challenges and would likely offer a different set of factors that have contributed to their architectural developments, the connections warrant association.

It would be foolish to suggest that we can import Australia's and New Zealand's architecture wholesale to the United States. For decades, design decisions here have largely been dictated by choice, not necessity. By examining a building culture where people have adapted to and accommodated nature's extremes not out of want but out of need, creating an existence that is not only passable but also enjoyable we stand to gain from their hard-learned lessons. *Learning from Las Vegas* may have offered a revolution for architectural education in the 1970s, but in this new era of environmentalism, the time has come to learn from Down Under.

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In Memoriam: Jørn Utzon 1918–2008
Danish architect Jørn Utzon, who recently passed away at age 90, never visited his most famous work, the Sydney Opera House, though it's visited by over two million people each year. Utzon's early ambition was to become a naval engineer like his father, but an artistic uncle sparked in him an interest in architecture, which transformed into a design aesthetic responsive to nature and a site's surroundings. During WWII, he worked under mentor Alvar Aalto in Finland, and at age 38, he became the unlikely winner of the Sydney Opera House competition with his design of sail-like shells, based on the geometry of an orange. In 1962, Utzon moved to Sydney but left in 1966—seven years before construction was completed—when the local minister for public works suspended his salary over budget and schedule conflicts. Utzon relocated to Majorca, Spain, where he spent most of the remainder of his life and designed his lesser-known masterpieces, including the Kuwait National Assembly and the Church in Bagsværd, Denmark.

Kudos to the Dwell designers who brought a new dimension to the magazine with the vertical orientation of pages 128 through 159, especially the Edward Burtynsky quarry photographs (November 2008). Let's hope we see more double-truck layouts in future issues. Your fine publication inspires even those of us who do not design grand houses like the one in Abiquiu ("My House").

Ben Laime
Albuquerque, New Mexico

I downloaded the Zinio digital magazine reader and bought a subscription to Dwell. Thirty minutes later and half way through my first-ever digital magazine, your November 2008 issue, I was thrilled to bits and had decided that I'd never again need to order another print subscription.

Then I hit page 128—and started cursing. There is no effective way to





read the sideways layout using the Zinio reader; there is no way to rotate the pages and the keyboard shortcuts that work so well for a standard layout become useless. Unless I want to stand my laptop on its edge, I have no way to read the cover story. And without a laptop, reading it would be completely impossible. So with my first digital issue I've already run into the need to buy the paper version as well.

I'm sure you guys are not thrilled by the idea of being constrained by the layout limitations of a digital magazine reader, but as more and more people attempt to go green, digital magazines are obviously the wave of the future. Could you please try to stick to a conventional layout that is readable with a laptop in its standard position?

Danielle Arvanitis
Dallas, Texas

Editors' Note: We're glad you subscribed to the digital edition but sorry it was lost in translation. Hopefully you were able to view the print copy and enjoy the vertical layouts—though you won't need to for every issue.

What happened to the Dwell staff that could possibly explain the titanic lapse in judgment evident in the November issue, beginning with page 126? While reading, I first thought: Well, this is a stupid advertiser—why would they run an ad sideways? It's impossible to read in that format and my guess is that 97 percent of readers would not bother to turn the magazine. Who wants to exercise while they are reading?

I swiftly turned the page, only to be confronted with an actual article ("Perfect Pitch") also sideways. Yikes! I quickly turned the page from this second offense, and…yet another two pages turned sideways. Did the entire Dwell staff miss Magazine Graphics 101, where the number-one rule is to never make it hard to read an issue? Your graphic disaster continued all the way to page 159; that's 33 hard-to-read, difficult-to-handle, and exceedingly annoying pages.

Ross MacTaggart
Sent via email

I was pleasantly surprised as I turned pages 128 through 159 in your November 2008 issue. I appreciate it very much that you challenge our perceptions of design not only through journalism and photography but also through the ways that they're presented. Keep up the good work.

John Ferguson Jr.
Kensington, California

The Taalman-Koch family ("iT House, Joshua Tree," November 2008) put a lot of effort into building an environmentally friendly house, so the sight ▶

of their daughter in disposable diapers struck a discordant note. Cloth diapers would certainly be more consistent with the low-environmental impact they are trying to achieve.

Judi Duncan
Sent via email

I enjoy much of the architecture featured in Dwell; however, this month's cover strikes at the ultimate arrogance of design: some wealthy individual who owns three acres of land on a secluded lakefront builds in a location where no one can avoid seeing his home ("Floating House, Lake Huron," November 2008). The owner refers to the island as "my heaven" and describes the proposed buildings as a "necklace" around the island. I wonder how the folks who don't own that slice of heaven feel about what once was an unobstructed shoreline.

Mike Burdo
Sent via email

Your November 2008 issue arrived in our mailbox the very same day my architect husband returned from a yearlong deployment to Iraq. Typically I devour Dwell the day it arrives, but (understandably) it took me a few days to read it this time around. I was delighted to come across Charles Montgomery's essay "The Good Earth," which intersects two seemingly disparate aspects of our life: modern design and the military. Dwell inspires me regularly, but thank you for publishing something that truly hit close to home. I shouldn't speak for him, but I suspect my husband has seen enough HESCOs to last him a lifetime.

Alison Kerr
Albuquerque, New Mexico

I used to look forward to getting my monthly Dwell magazine, but after about six issues I'm beginning to tire of the box aesthetic. All the home designs are beginning to look alike: flat roofs, cedar siding, and clerestory windows. I thought Dwell celebrated design made for living, but tell me how the house on the front of the October 2008 issue ("Plains Gold") is livable. Who in their right mind would want to trek up and down 16 stairs with young kids and groceries? I can understand if they were living in a flood plain but really, the treehouse analogy seems contrived. I'm sorry, but the articles are getting stale.

Yun Yee Chow
Toronto, Ontario

On page 175 of the October 2008 issue ("Plains Gold") you pictured a bathroom cabinet with sliding doors. It looks like it's made of fiberglass and reinforced with a metal of some kind. Is this a custom piece or is it available for purchase? What are the sliding panels made of? Many thanks.

Christopher Peterson
New York, New York

Editors' Note: Architect and homeowner Jamie Darnell designed the cabinet, and Don Graden, who constructed all the cabinetry throughout the house, built it. The bathroom cabinet is made of Baltic birch plywood with a Formica countertop. The doors are made from 3form Varia panels in the "cirque" graphic style, available from 3-form.com. For more information or to contact Darnell, visit eldoradoarchitects.com.

I love your magazine: Dwell inspired us to make our 1949 cottage here in Waikiki the envy of our neighborhood by including many ideas from the pages of your magazine.

I was interested to see your article about Honolulu ("Detour," October 2008), but what a disappointment. Those were some of the worst pictures I have ever seen in a magazine article—ever. Even your surf shot showed no surf! Our sky is blue so you must have been here during a vog (volcanic smog) day. Too bad you missed the great Hawaiian colors and our new environmentally friendly buildings.

The focus on dead architects and Dean Sakamoto was another bummer. I agree with your article that most of their buildings are inhumane and, on close inspection, very ugly. Why promote these no-talent, old-fashioned hacks? Your writer and photographer did not dig very deeply and the article did not capture what is going on out here in Hawaii.

Maybe you can visit another time and get someone to explore beyond the *Honolulu Magazine* and *Honolulu Weekly* cover articles that we have to put up with in our local media. I really expected something better from Dwell.

Still love your magazine and will continue to seek new ideas from you.

David Baccus
Waikiki, Hawaii

I love your work and look forward to every issue, but I have a request that would significantly increase my enjoyment of your articles on renovation projects: It would greatly increase the value if the article included the costs and square footage as well as before and after pictures—though I do appreciate it when floor plans are shown. These more practical bits of information provide a handy reference for those of us who have a curiosity for the quantifiable. While I realize this may not always be possible, it would be a much-welcomed addition.

Arvind Kohli
Columbus, Ohio

Editors' Note: We're knee-deep in the gathering process of before and after pictures of the homes we'll be featuring in our April 2009 renovations-themed issue. In the meantime, we'll keep including costs and sizes whenever possible.

Thanks for your vigilance in promoting sustainability and good design and also for presenting us with many creative energy-saving solutions. But in future issues, whenever addressing "alternative" transportation or "alternative" energy resources, please substitute the word "appropriate." The outcome will be a much more honest evaluation of our alternatives. With not a small amount of work and education, Americans will, I hope, soon regard fossil fuels as the alternative.

Rob Bregoff
San Francisco, California

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Aya Brackett
Aya Brackett is a San Francisco-based photographer whose work has appeared in books, gallery shows, and publications such as the *Sunday Telegraph*, *Travel & Leisure*, and *Gastronomica*. While photographing backyard-shed expert Kathleen Walsh ("Dwell Reports," p. 66) Brackett had a chance to peruse succulents and admire oversize planters at Flora Grubb Gardens, where the portrait was taken (and which was featured in Dwell's October 2007 issue). Brackett is now nursing an intense desire to create her own outdoor lounging area, complete with wild herbs and hanging grass balls.

Roger D'Souza
To shoot the Zulaikha-Laurence house ("A Measured Approach," p. 86), Sydney-based photographer Roger D'Souza needed only travel a few suburbs west to Balmain Point. "I loved shooting this house with its amazing inside-outside feel and quirky artwork," he says. "The views alone were spectacular, but the inside was very welcoming." After the shoot, D'Souza learned that a friend of his had lived in the Balmain Point house prior to its sale and renovation. "She had very happy memories of friend-filled barbecues on the water's edge at dusk," D'Souza says. "It was great to see the house in its new state and see the owners enjoying it just as much."

Jaime Gross
Jaime Gross is a San Francisco-based writer who traveled Down Under to report on a most unusual collaboration: a home designed and built by a pair of neighbors—one, a married couple who became licensed contractors so they could afford to build the house and the other, a group of architects whose studio was situated next door ("Site Unseen," p. 78). "It's easy to imagine the project going terribly wrong but it was a success: The couple has their dream home, and the architects have a gorgeous show house right next to their offices, as well as the great views they were determined to preserve," Gross says.

Jeremy Hansen
To write one of his two stories in this issue, Kiwi journalist Jeremy Hansen flew from his home in Auckland, on New Zealand's North Island, to the South Island city of Queenstown, in the heart of the spectacular alpine region ("Nature Nurtured," p. 94). (He also traveled an hour and a half north to Great Barrier Island to write this month's "Off the Grid," p. 60.) The only downside of Hansen's visit to the lakeside home of architects Bronwen Kerr and Pete Ritchie: He's been dreaming of living there ever since.

Stephen Oxenbury
Although UK-born, Australia-based photographer Stephen Oxenbury has been shooting professionally for over 20 years, stepping off the back of the plane in Queenstown, New Zealand, to capture the Kerr-Ritchie residence (p. 94) had him gasping and smiling like his three-year-old son. "The glorious, unreal, snow-capped-mountain terrain was enough to rekindle the most jaded soul," he says. "Plus, the hospitality of my hosts was generous, the architecture exciting, and the local pinot second to none."

Karen Pakula
Karen Pakula is a staff writer at the *Sydney Morning Herald*. After 15 years of her own home renovations—on one old terrace, with one old husband, a builder—she headed to Melbourne, Australia, for a tutorial in pragmatic, economical modernism from ultra-creative couple Cat Macleod and Michael Bellemo ("My House," p. 53). Pakula returned with a valuable lesson she plans to pass down to her children: The smartest way to build a dream home is to start from scratch.

Leif Parsons
Brooklyn-based artist Leif Parsons, who created the illustrations that help explain the inner workings of rainwater collection systems ("Off the Grid," p. 60), offers two pieces of advice to aspiring designers: First, take lots of naps. "Lie down and think and think and think until you fall asleep; when you awake, hopefully you will have a brilliant idea," Parsons says. Second, when really desperate, take a hot shower—ideally while making lists of associations with kids' bath crayons.

Prue Ruscoe
Australian photographer Prue Ruscoe headed south to Melbourne from her home in Bondi Beach, Sydney, to capture this month's "My House" (p. 53). The best part of living Down Under, she says: being able to have picnic dinners on the beach with her husband and two children. Ruscoe's recent projects include a coffee-table book of bedrooms for Pottery Barn as well as a two-book series published by Murdoch Books, *Sense of Style: Colors* and *Sense of Style: Space*.

Marcus Trimble
Marcus Trimble is the founding architect of the Sydney-based firm Super Colossal. Between writing posts for his firm's blog (supercolossal.ch) and organizing Pecha Kucha nights in his country's capital, Trimble traveled the short distance to Balmain Point to write his first story for Dwell ("A Measured Approach," p. 86). Trimble grew up a rabid supporter of the Balmain Tigers rugby team and is glad to see that this recently gentrified but historically working-class suburb is now the home to a house that sits with ease on its industrial harbor.



Two of Bronwen Kerr and Pete Ritchie's children play outside the family's steel-and-cedar-clad home, tucked quietly into the Queenstown, New Zealand, landscape.

Photo by Stephen Oxenbury


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More Nice

Adolf Loos was a pretty grumpy modernist—the author of *Ornament and Crime* even opined that gingerbread was best left undecorated. Though we're all entitled to our own feelings about ornament (and gingerbread), one crime we'd like to avoid is not telling our stories in full. So we're revisiting our Nice Modernist from the October 2008 issue (p. 64) by bundling some unseen images into an online slideshow at dwell.com.
dwell.com/slideshows

Dwell Playlist

Played at just the right moment, the right music can make the so-so spectacular and the terrestrial transcendent. To assist us in our aural alignment we've recruited a cadre of creative architects and designers to share the playlists that elevate their existences to euphonius heights. Just log in and tune in at dwell.com.
dwell.com/podcasts









Photos courtesy Project H Design

In 2007 Emily Pilloton (top left), founder of the San Francisco-based nonprofit Project H, delivered a freshwater transportation solution to 17 villages in South Africa in the form of sturdy polyethylene drums called "Hippo Rollers." The barrels, conceived by a team of international designers, hold up to 20 gallons—that's enough water to last a family of seven for three to four days—and feature clip-on steel handles that allow them to be pushed, rather than balanced perilously atop one's head.

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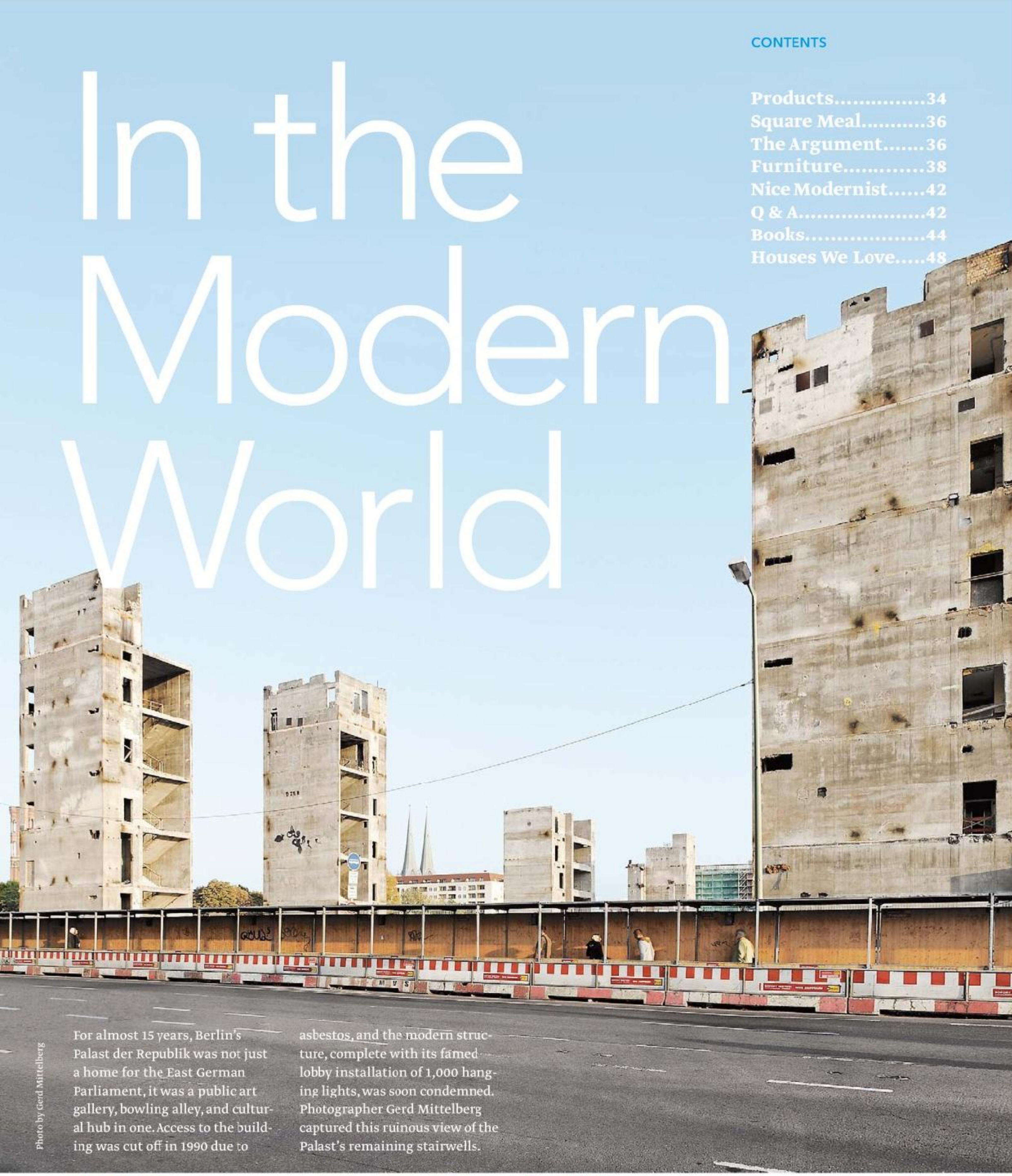
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In the Modern World



For almost 15 years, Berlin's Palast der Republik was not just a home for the East German Parliament, it was a public art gallery, bowling alley, and cultural hub in one. Access to the building was cut off in 1990 due to asbestos, and the modern structure, complete with its famed lobby installation of 1,000 hanging lights, was soon condemned. Photographer Gerd Mittelberg captured this ruinous view of the Palast's remaining stairwells.

Photo by Gerd Mittelberg

March Calendar
Important dates in art and design, with architecture thrown in for good measure: Welcome to Dwell's timeline of the month.

March (2009)
In a month of exhibition closings, *Living Room* shuts down at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. gallery.ca/english

Forest glasses
by Hasan Demir Obuz for Ilio
ilio.eu
When you're too thirsty to see the forest for the trees, this collection of evergreen glasses should help keep you suitably quenched. Pick your poison, choose your chalice, and sip your way to satiation.



The Drop speakers
by Graham Allen for Scandyna
podspeakers.com
Greetings, earthlings! Take us to your iPod. Blast off with bumping beats from these Scandyna space oddities with sound as clear as a radio transmission from ground control to Major Tom.



Victoria Butler coatrack
by Hlynur Atlason with Peter Ash for Atlason
atlason.com
The deceptive disarray of this shiny rack is anything but random. Careful composition of 19 lacquered dowels provides multiple pegs for the clothes you cast off as you stroll through the apartment door: No slicker will slip; no hoodie will fall to the floor. Should you need to shed your chapeau, Victoria Butler's puzzle of pick-up sticks plays sturdy host to cap and coat.



March 1 (2009)
Legendary designer George Nelson's retrospective comes to an end at the Vitra—and will soon hit the road. design-museum.de

March 2 (2009)
Dreamland: Architectural Experiments Since the 1970s closes at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. moma.org


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Mobile Eateries

With street food enjoying a renaissance across the United States, it may no longer be necessary to steer clear of trailer fare. From coast to coast, top chefs are trading frenzied restaurant kitchens for the tight quarters of a mobile unit, transforming what we can expect from meals on wheels.

At a shiny Airstream in Seattle called Skillet, a quick transaction through the sliding window yields a wagyu beef burger topped with bacon jam. Owners Danny Sizemore and Josh Henderson, both trained chefs, offer high-quality food without the markup of a traditional restaurant. "We want to provide impeccably prepared, seasonally relevant food that won't hurt your wallet," Sizemore says, and the instant popularity of Skillet proves that a highly designed space isn't a prerequisite for a great meal. Of course, some people still take their first visit to Skillet with a serving of skepticism, Sizemore adds, "but once they try it, they like it."

Head south to Austin, Texas, where Torchy's Tacos holds true to the Tex-Mex tradition—but the tacos that come out of their aromatic "trailer park" are uncommonly good. "We see our food as gourmet cuisine on a tortilla," says co-owner Bob Gentry. "Items such as turkey mole, fried avocado, and Baja shrimp tacos are far from the norm in other trailers or trucks." Situated next to a busy thoroughfare, the tree-shaded clearing is an undesigned outdoor dining room with well-defined ambiance and a constant stream of patrons who take their time to taste an exceptional taco in a plastic chair by the roadside.

skilletstreetfood.com
torchystacos.com





On the Porch

An architect recently gave me a tour of the modern house he'd built for his and his wife's retirement. Every detail had been carefully planned: The sightline through each window was chosen to capture specific views of the woods and river that ran behind the house, and the exterior walls jutted out from the back deck at angles intended to block the neighbors from sight. We had the distinct sense of sitting alone in rustic isolation. Like many modern homes, the design was sensitive to the natural environment and endeavored to bring the outdoors in. But also like many modern homes, it omitted a classic architectural feature that traditionally has served as a transition between outside and inside space: the front porch.

They tell us there was an earlier time in American life when the streets were safe, when kids played outside from dawn till dusk while their parents and grandparents watched over them from the cool, breezy shelter of a front porch. The idyll of that era might be more mythology than fact, but it is true that these days the front porch is a sight more commonly seen in historic districts than in new developments. We might excuse 4,000-square-foot, cookie-cutter monstrosities from failing to appreciate the quiet dignity of the front porch, but why have modernists, who make a point of building in harmony with a home's natural surroundings, also largely abandoned this classic outdoor space?

Before air-conditioning, porches served as passive cooling systems. They stood on the eastern or southern sides of homes so as to be comfortable in the late afternoons and catch natural breezes. The advent of A/C has increasingly brought social life inside during the warm months, and, as suburban growth encouraged people to think of their homes as stand-alone capsules of family life rather than as co-dependent parts of a community, developers saw little need to tack on an old-fashioned porch.

At the same time, modern architects were making their marks on growing suburban communities, expressing an interest in site-specific design that worked with, not against, the natural environment. Unfortunately, many modernist developers failed to consider how homes would interact with each other and create community life; architects might painstakingly study the contours of a home's backyard, but they weren't very interested in the neighbors. Indeed, modern homes are often oriented toward the back and use design tricks to block out views of adjacent homes. As walls of glass came into vogue, so too did a pervasive desire for privacy. Open floor plans trumped open neighborhoods.

I asked architect Frank Harmon about modernism's regard for the exterior world. "Certainly the building as a stand-alone structural object is one of the unfortunate by-products of modernism," says Harmon, who specializes in regional design. But he sees hope for a resurgence of the porch as part of the growing interest in sustainable design. He encourages his clients to incorporate as much outdoor space as possible into their homes—partly so that they won't have to pay to heat or cool it.

But there's another reason why porches are sustainable: They build community. When neighbors sit out front, they get to know each other, provide eyes on the street, and create safer, more pleasant, more walkable neighborhoods. It's enough to make you thirst for a tall, icy glass of lemonade.

—Drew Himmelstein

Photos by Clarisse Haack (Torchy's Tacos), Jenni Geel (Skillet Trailer)

Square Meal

The Argument



Strauss chair
by Gebrüder Thonet Vienna
thonet-vienna.com
Sibling rivalry is rough. What to do when you're related to the Gebrüder Thonet Vienna Café chair (No. 18), one of the most recognizable seats of the last 178 years? Straighten up and stand tall, Strauss, and make your mark on your own four legs. *(left)*

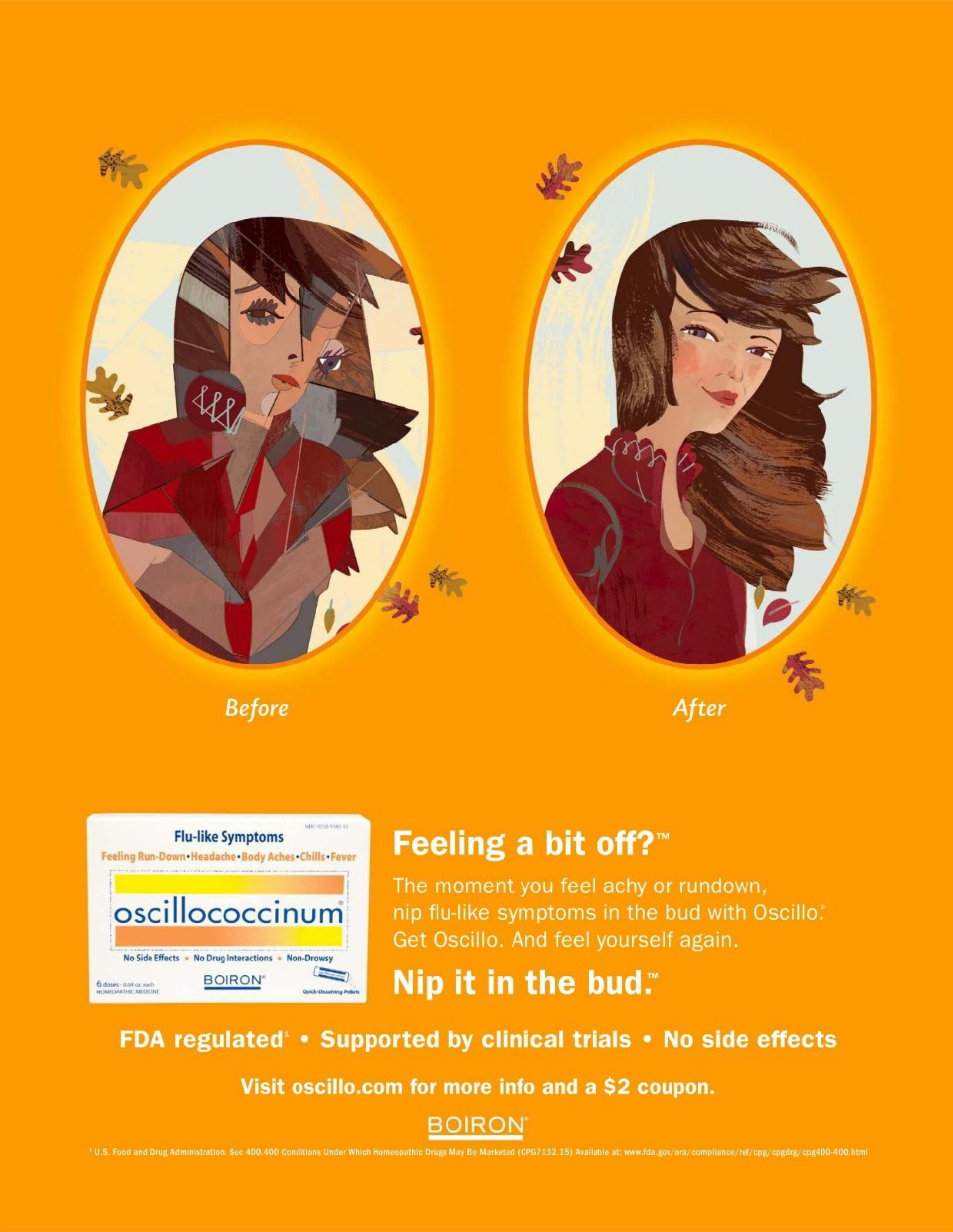
Labware lamps
by Benjamin Hubert
benjaminhubert.co.uk
Make like a mad scientist and let these Labware lamps illuminate your living room. Hunchbacked henchman and horrible monster not required; just light one up, look to the heavens, and yell, "It's alive!"



Slide sofa
by Anna Hart for Mark
markproduct.com
A superior sofa must be versatile, accommodating any number of potential scenarios; who knows what will play out on a spread of comfy cushions? Anna Hart's settee sets a stylish scene with unlimited possibilities. Solo night in? Stretch out and relax. House party? Extrawide armrests provide perfect perches for social butterflies. Special someone staying over? No need to be red-faced if you end up crashing on this electric-blue Slide.



March 15 (2009)
Setting the Stage: Twentieth-Century Theater Models closes at the Bruce Museum in Greenwich, Connecticut. brucemuseum.org



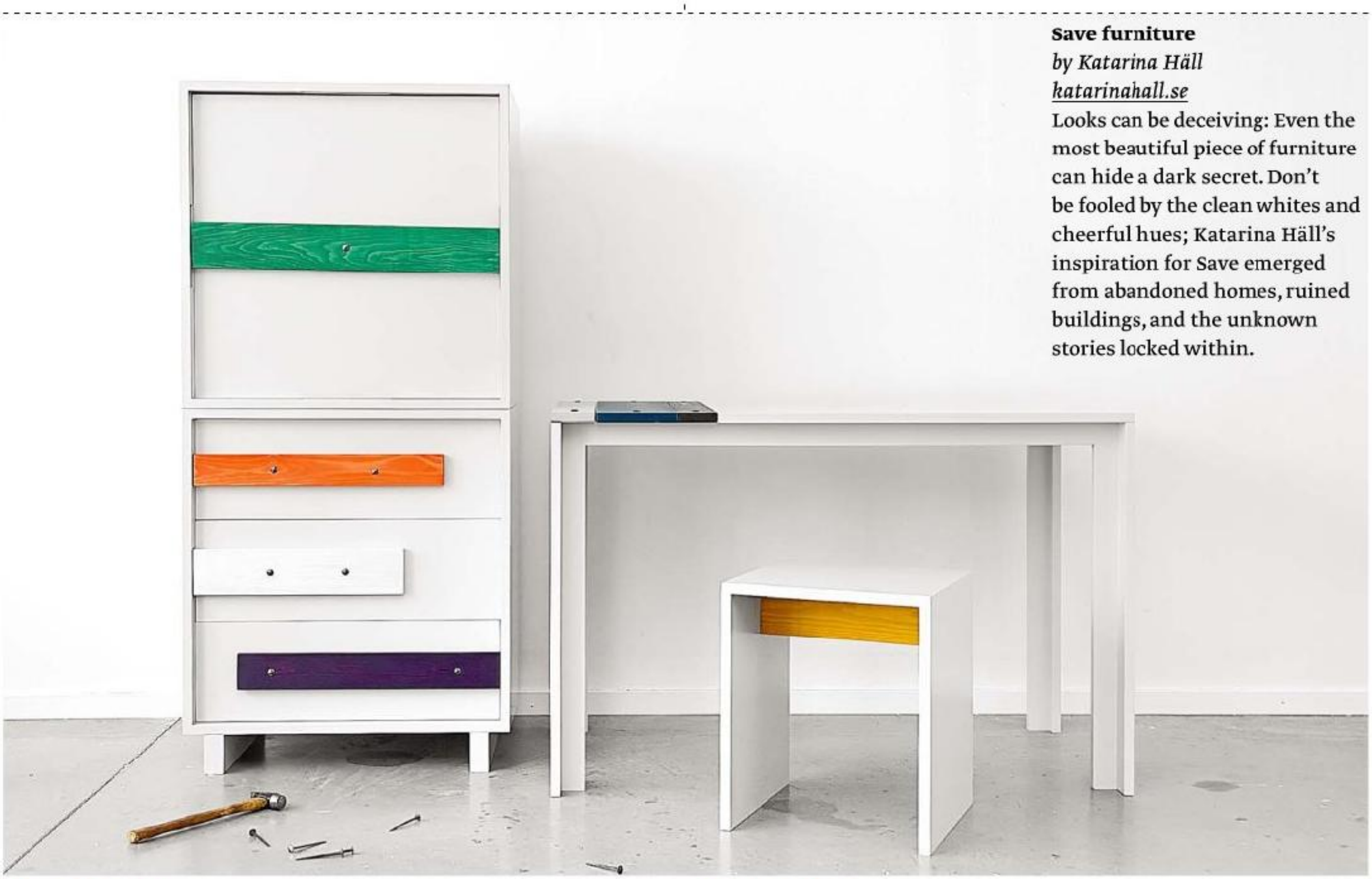
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PH50 lamp
by Poul Henningsen
for Louis Poulsen
louispoulsen.com
Break out the bubbly, it's time for a toast. Here's to the golden anniversary of Louis Poulsen's colorful classic PH5—recently reissued as PH50—and cheers to a very bright future indeed.

Taapa shelf
by Hold for Essenze
essenze.co.nz
Get your geometric groove on with the customizable Taapa. Create a shelving system that deserves as much attention as the books you oh so carefully choose to display.





Save furniture
by Katarina Häll
katarinahall.se
Looks can be deceiving: Even the most beautiful piece of furniture can hide a dark secret. Don't be fooled by the clean whites and cheerful hues; Katarina Häll's inspiration for Save emerged from abandoned homes, ruined buildings, and the unknown stories locked within.

March 18–28 (2009)
New York's Storefront for Art and Architecture kicks off a 10-day nomadic series of evening events. storefrontnews.org

March 21 (1887)
Futurist architect Erich Mendelsohn, famous for his groovy Einstein Tower in Potsdam, Germany, is born.



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Koji Tsutsui



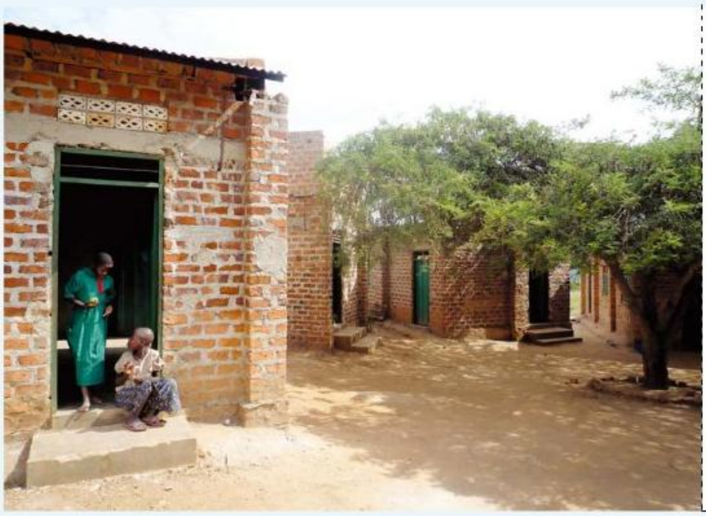
In September 2008, architect Koji Tsutsui accepted the Ceramic Tiles of Italy award for designing a modern, white-tiled residence in Tokyo. One day later, he traded the spotlights of European design for the blazing gratitude of 200 children in central Uganda.

Tsutsui's most recent project, Mukwano Village, is five hours by four-wheel drive from Uganda's capital city of Kampala. Both orphanage and school, this eight-building encampment resembles a small village. It houses 50 children orphaned by AIDS and roughly 200 kids from the surrounding area—and it is expected to expand in the years to come.

Tsutsui, who studied under Tadao Ando, has learned to thrive in solving the challenge of boxed-in urban space, but rural Uganda presented a very different experience for the San Francisco–based architect. To construct the village, a local nonprofit organization also named Mukwano—meaning "intimate friends" in the central Ugandan language of Luganda—called on members of the community for their help. The resulting handbuilt structures radiate out from a large tree that offers shelter for airy outdoor classes. "We really wanted to respect the big tree in the middle," Tsutsui explains. "After all, it's the oldest, most natural roof out there. And I was able to create spaces between the buildings, to cast shadows on the ground for the kids to play in, out of the hot sun."

Solar panels were installed, helping to make the project not just socially but environmentally sustainable, and a rainwater tank saves trips to the nearest lake. "As the kids grow, they can extend this orphanage into an actual village, with more structures," the architect points out. "And, as a vital part of the building process, they can use architecture as a focal point for moving their community forward."

kt-aa.com
For more images visit dwell.com/slideshow



Nice Modernist

Gary Hustwit



In 2007, Brooklyn-based filmmaker Gary Hustwit wowed the design world—and opened the eyes of the font-ignorant public—with his feature-length documentary *Helvetica*, which celebrates the complex history of the eponymous typeface. Hustwit has once again toured the globe, camera in hand, this time meeting people who design the everyday objects that make our lives easier. His new film, *Objectified*, premieres this month at South by Southwest.

What's your favorite object?
I'm a Mac addict, so my MacBook Pro or iPhone. I'm also into mid-'60s Plymouth Valiants.

What object do you use most often?
The iPhone. I can't imagine what life was like before the iPhone—and that's when you know it really works.

What theme came up most in your conversations with designers?
Designers are problem solvers: They're constantly trying to do things better and reinvent things to make them more useful. Even Dieter Rams is still actively learning about new materials and technologies.

How has making this film changed the way you look at everyday objects?
I really think about what I buy now: (A) Do I really need this? (B) What if this is the last of this object that I ever buy? I don't want to buy chairs I'll be sick of in five to ten years.

What will your next documentary be about?
I like the idea of taking a closer look at the things we take for granted and changing the way people think about them, whether it's type or objects or whatever.

objectifiedfilm.com
For an extended interview visit dwell.com



Q & A

Illustrations by Elisabeth Moch











Nomadic Furniture
James Hennessey and Victor Papanek
Schiffer, $29.99
Originally published in 1973, this hand-lettered guide to all things nomadic, portable, sit-on-able, and made of wood has finally made it back into print. From toy chests to benches that fold out of the wall, *Nomadic Furniture* is an irresistible and softly nostalgic look at the hippie heights of DIY.

Meadowlands
Joshua Lutz
PowerHouse Books, $50
Photographer Joshua Lutz describes the bleak New Jersey Meadowlands as "a 32-square-mile stretch of sweeping wilderness that evokes morbid fantasies of Mafia hits and buried remains." It's also an overlooked site of industrial Americana that remained visually undiscovered until the arrival of this wide-eyed photographer and his expert lens. The volume includes an essay by Robert Sullivan.

Data Flow: Visualizing Information in Graphic Design
Robert Klanten et al.
Gestalten, $78
If information comes in all shapes and sizes, then we'll always need a new way to graph it. This hefty look at construction maps, workflow process diagrams, website-linkage charts, family trees for Fortune 500 companies—and on and on and on—will be an inspiration to designers (and a headache to the easily intimidated).

After the Crash: Architecture in Post-Bubble Japan
Thomas Daniell
Princeton Architectural Press, $24.95
Expatriate architect Thomas Daniell, now a resident in Kyoto, takes us on a historical and spatial tour of his adopted home country. Part architectural handbook, part critical look at contemporary building, *After the Crash* spans the economy, infrastructure, and impossibly small spaces of modern Japan.



Photo by Peter Belanger

March 27 (1886)
Super-architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe is born—and the modernist box has never been the same.

March 29 (2009)
The Olympic Stadium Project—Le Corbusier and Baghdad closes at London's Victoria & Albert Museum. vam.ac.uk

Strike a Pose: Eccentric Architecture and Spectacular Spaces
Robert Klanten and Lukas Feireiss, Editors
Gestalten, $89
It's rare that a book about self-described "eccentric architecture" is worth taking a look at, but *Strike a Pose* is a refreshing exception. Want surging roof lines, heaving cantilevers, punctured walls, and at least 20 houses we love? They're all here. The last chapter, "Crazy Diamond," is the only drag: Arbitrary crystal forms are the new postmodern kitsch.

Updating Germany: 100 Projects for a Better Future
Friedrich von Borries and Matthias Böttger, Editors
Hatje Cantz, $45
The United States needs a guide like this: 100 often sarcastic, frequently impossible, but reliably thought-provoking ideas for urban and architectural improvements throughout Germany. Proposing new energy sources, new landscapes, and even new forms of burial, *Updating Germany* explores the idea that "real change begins at home."

The Philip Johnson Tapes
Robert A. M. Stern
Monacelli, $40
This new collection of interviews, conducted by Robert A. M. Stern and edited by Kazys Varnelis, gives us a glimpse of a more personal side to the Pritzker Prize-winning American architect—who was once infamously "carried away by it all" at a 1938 Hitler rally. Philip Johnson's controversial politics are only part of the interest in this historically important tome.

Superstructures in Space
Michael H. Gorn
Merrell, $39.95
Some of the coolest architecture in the world is actually *off*-world: hovering above us in space, placed into orbit by international space programs both public and private. These satellites and space stations—some still classified, others mere ruins, long past their prime—bring modernist functionality to the heavens.

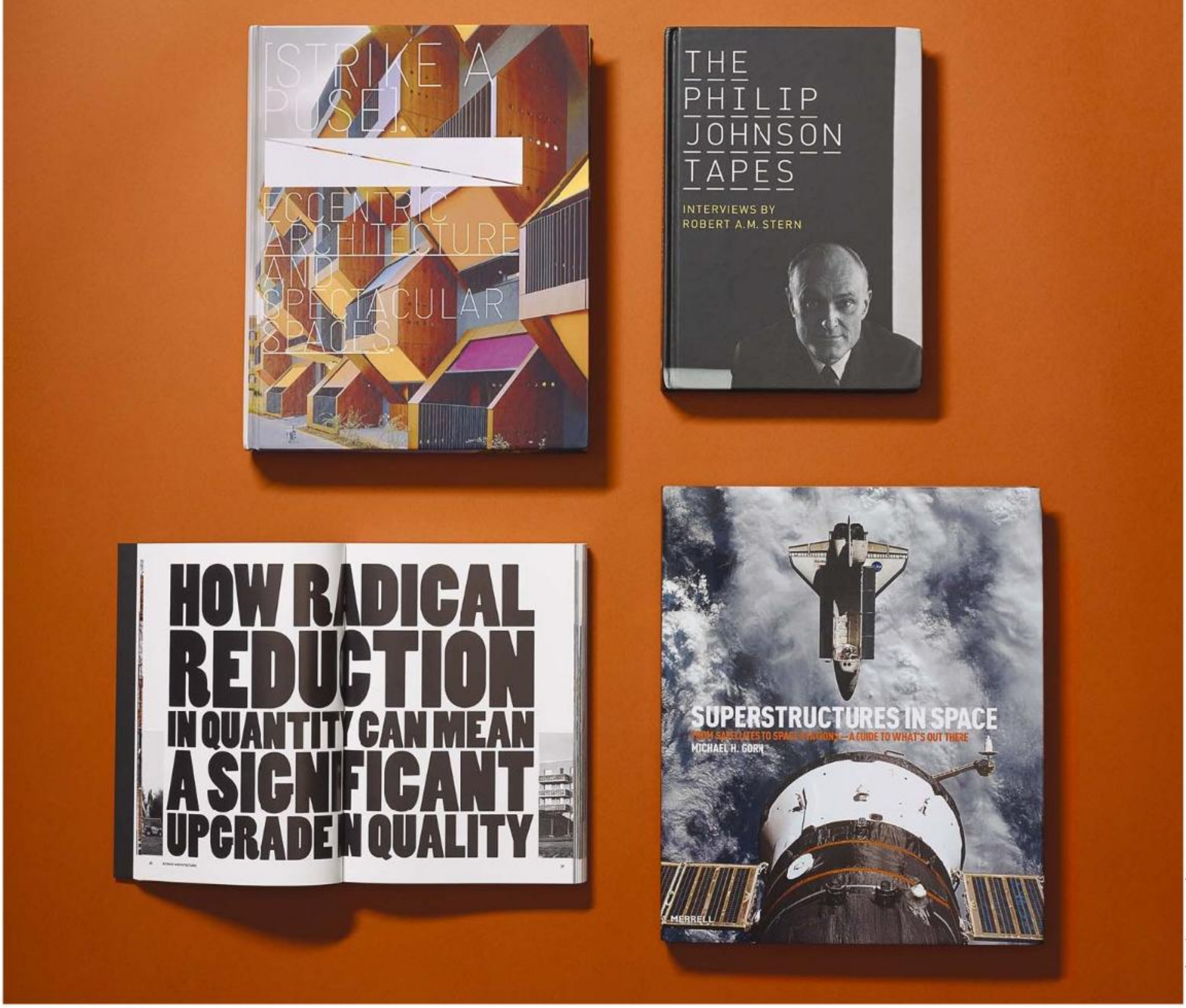
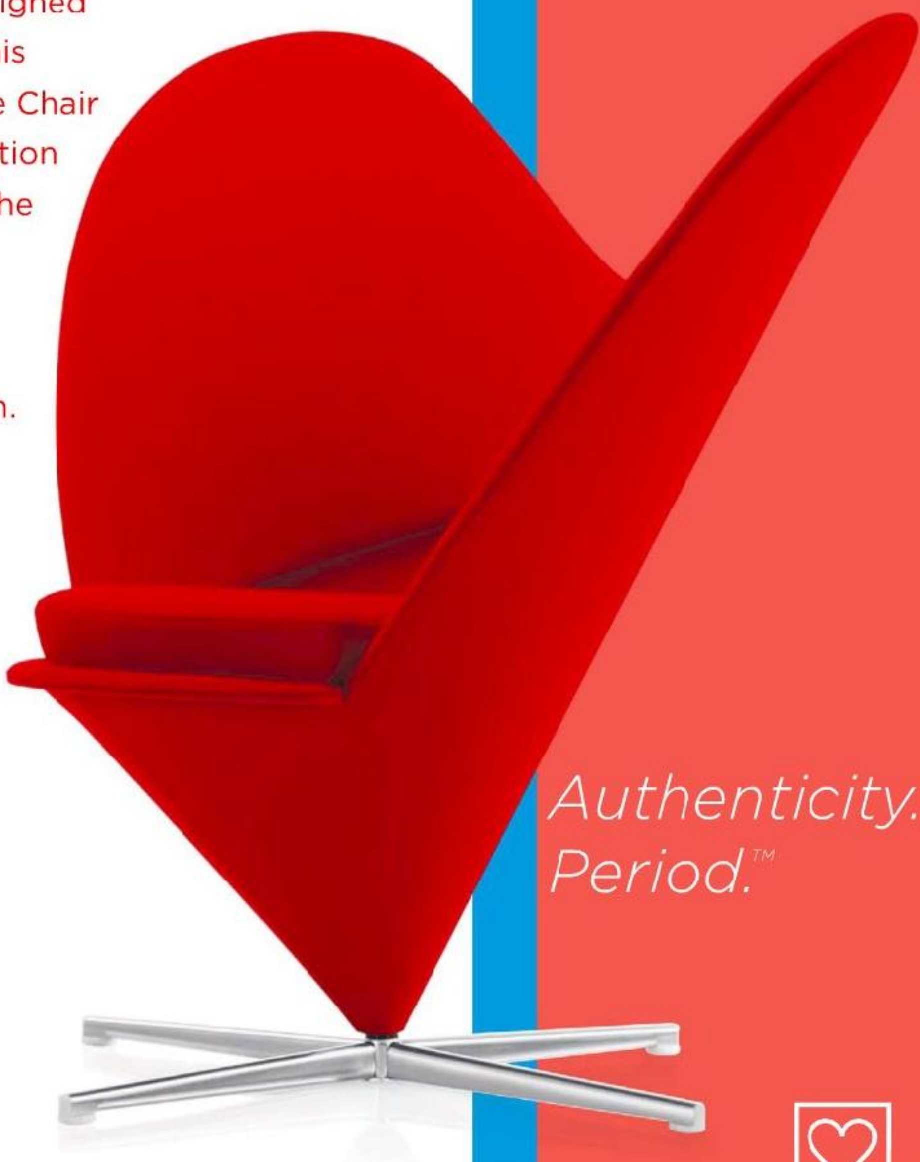


Photo by Peter Belanger

March 30 (2009)
Ateliers Jean Prouvé closes at the MoMA.
moma.org







Shell House
Karuizawa, Japan
Kotaro Ide/ARTechnic Architects

Kells Cottage
Kells, Ireland
Bates Maher Architects
architectstm.com

Photos by Alessio Guarino (Shell House), Alice Clancy (Kells Cottage)

Houses We Love



Lee Treehouse
Singapore
Joseph Lim Architect
ras-a.com

Photo by Simon Devitt

Houses We Love

01



02



03



04



05



06



07



08



09



10



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customer file

Jennifer C. Dervin / SF. CA.

01 Black ceramic sculpture picked up in Oaxaca Mexico
02 The book that took me around the world
03 Wooden Rhino puzzle I brought home for my son
04 My father's camera that still takes great shots
05 Japanese backpack given to me by a business owner
06 Marcel Wanders Egg Vase
07 Grandma's favorite scissors that I use daily
08 My Fukasawa lamp from YLighting
09 Kimono doll found in an alley store. Tokyo
10 Favorite one pot meal cooker by iittala



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Bellemo & Cat's Cradle

Architect-sculptor double act Cat Macleod and Michael Bellemo first came to our attention with their Cocoon weekender, a steel-clad blimp suspended in a canopy on the Australian coastline. Their new primary home (and HQ for their practice, Bellemo & Cat) in Melbourne is a funky, split-level cube wrapped in an extraordinary printed facade. Macleod describes the making of an eccentric, multifunctional, personal sanctuary.



As told to Karen Pakula
Photos by Prue Ruscoe
Illustrations by Christine Berrie

After a day in the office downstairs, Michael Bellemo and Cat Macleod congregate on their bleacher-like steps with their kids Marco, six, Flora, four, and 19-year-old Celeste.





We definitely didn't want to renovate something. We wanted to start from scratch so it's all totally personalized. When we found the land, we actually liked the grungy nature of it in the back of a laneway. It was small, affordable, and instantly an architectural challenge. And we loved the fact that it was north-facing, with nothing north of us that would block our view. There are lots of artists and it's a busy working place, so we thought we could also run a business from here.

We had to work quickly because it's a big mortgage. We were the builders as well. Michael physically built the Cocoon house at Wye River; having never built a house before, he took on a building that was completely round, on a cliff, and two-and-a-half hours from anywhere. Totally mad. And it took us a long time, three or four years.

That house is so sculptural you could virtually say it is a sculpture in the bush, whereas this house is much more pragmatic. It's a big rectangle with a print on it. And with all the green, it's very peaceful in here. It's a bit tropical, like being in an artificial garden in some ways.

As sculptors, we actually build quite big things that don't have to be signed off as buildings, so we get to play around with form, and that's great because we feed that information back into our practice.

We had a lot to put in the house: Our office, two kids, offsite parking, and we had to get a balcony or some sort of outdoors area. But it never feels like you're in a box because of all the level changes. We've got a garage between the office space and the home, and we've got two separate doors. It's like *Get Smart*. You go through one door, close it, then you go through the other door, and then you're in the office. Just having the garage in between gives ▸



The building is a funky landmark in a drab industrial laneway. A row of windows (top left) casts light into the office (bottom), where Bellemo keeps a model of the house. The office is separated from the garage by a bright yellow sliding door. Macleod's handmade bedroom partition (top right) breaks up the open loftlike space and provides a bit of privacy for her and Bellemo. An Artemide Castore suspension light illuminates both the bedroom and kitchen below.







you a buffer, from an acoustic point of view and the physical distance.

Instead of putting the living areas on the ground floor we put them on the upper floors so you get the light and the view and the sense of removal from the immediate environment.

We wanted the kids in our living space but not in our face, not under our feet. We were in a terrace house before, and the lounge room was covered in children's toys. The kids are four and six, and here they're within eyeshot. Their room is a little bit of a den, and they have their own deck out there. We were going to have them sleeping in some sort of pod, then we realized it was a bit too close. The little people's bedroom downstairs is tiny, but they're tiny people. And they're happy there. When they grow, we'll probably go up to the next level. Our older child, who is 19, lives around the corner, but she stays here sometimes. She takes over the garage and makes costumes; she's into performance.

As architects we often design split-levels, but we haven't done stairs that are also seats like here. They've become an important transition space from the grown-up zone. The kids are always here reading, doing puzzles. Yesterday, I sat here with our youngest one, Flora, and we polished our fingernails.

One of the advantages of being the owner-builder and also the way that we work is that we allowed ourselves a reasonable amount of flexibility. But there are only three materials in the whole house—the Laminex is the same, the tiles are the same, and the exterior cladding comes inside through the walls. And there are three paint colors—white, turquoise, and apple green. It is so much clearer when you've just got the one exterior material.

Using Astroturf outside on the deck was a cost issue. Also, there's too much traffic for what would be a small strip of grass. Our kids are running up there all the time, and Michael plays bocce.

We've arranged the house just how we like it, and it's the warmest, lightest house I've ever lived in. You know, we could have bought an amazing painting, but we chose to make our own artwork of the whole building instead. ▸





A mid-century Australian sofa (top) discovered at a flea market and vibrant, eclectic art soften the architectural edges of the living room. The eye-catching kitchen cabinets behind Celeste and Macleod (bottom left) were custom-built in lemon Liri Laminate by Amerind. The island bench is made from the same alpine ash used on the floor and the stairs all the way up to the master bedroom (bottom right), where Flora sits in front of a clever divider Macleod created out of engineering felt. ℹ





Weave Me Alone
Macleod got crafty herself, weaving a privacy wall for the master bedroom out of woolen engineering felt. The screen is at once soft and industrial in feel and can be replaced inexpensively at any time.

Print's Charming
The home's breathtaking, fiberglass facade is printed with supersize images of a sculpture based on the couple's Cocoon weekender. Casting much-needed greenery onto a grungy alley, the semiopaque Ampelite Webglass cladding shields the family from the street while allowing a dappled emerald light to permeate indoors.
ampelite.com.au



Slide Effects
If you're outside on the upper level, there's only one way down—by slide. The lower deck belongs to the children, after all, and they make excellent use of it. "They run along the garden, down the slide, go down into their bedroom through their little jump-in-and-out window, then back around the stairs inside," Macleod explains.
groundsforplay.com



Cheap Seats
Replacing the traditional sharp edges of split-level homes, a set of bleachers links the living area with the sunken kids' zone. These generous platforms are twice the height and depth of the stairs, giving the children plenty of space to lay down with a book or a puzzle—within their parents' line of sight.
stairsupplies.com

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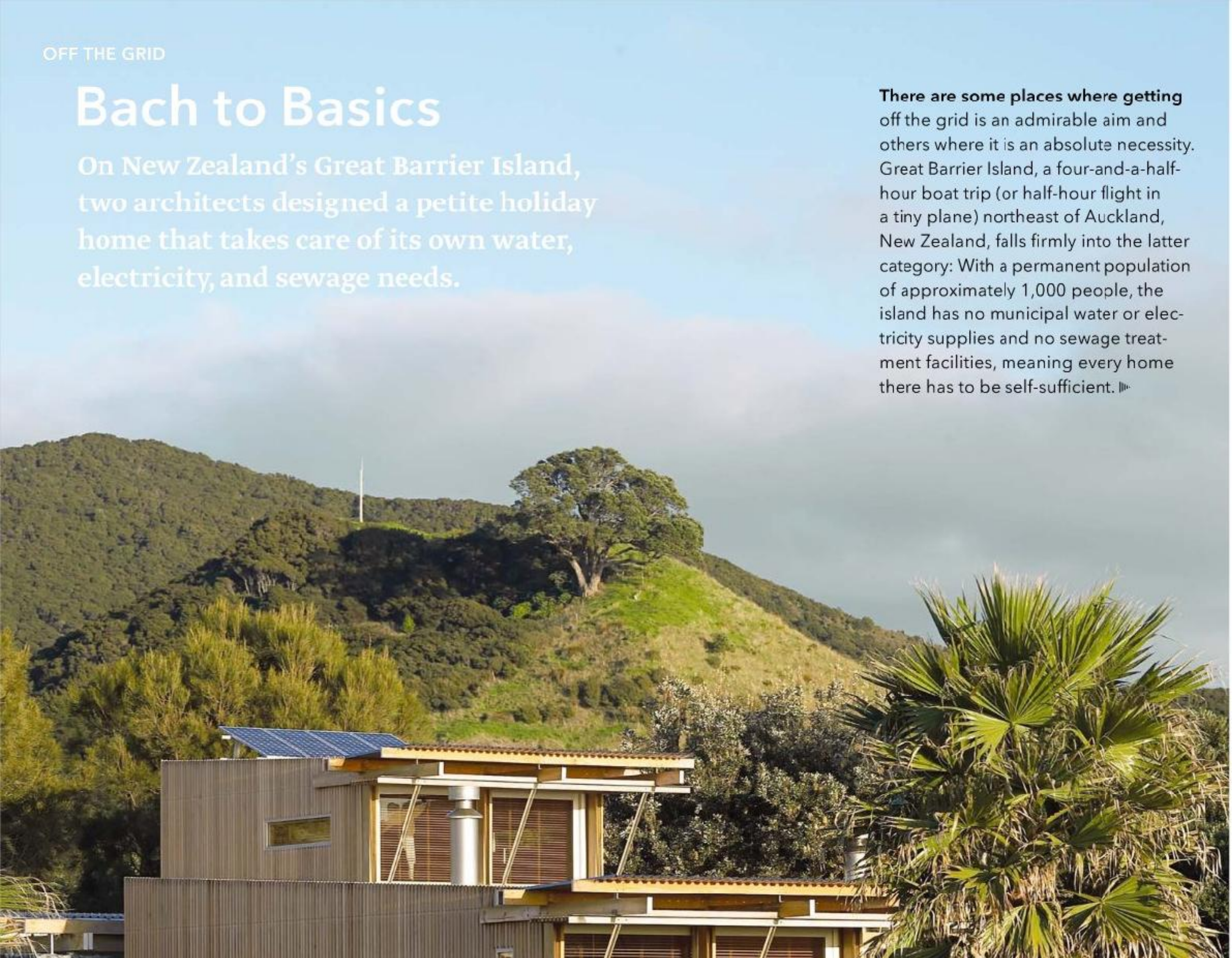
Make It Yours



Bach to Basics

On New Zealand's Great Barrier Island, two architects designed a petite holiday home that takes care of its own water, electricity, and sewage needs.

There are some places where getting off the grid is an admirable aim and others where it is an absolute necessity. Great Barrier Island, a four-and-a-half-hour boat trip (or half-hour flight in a tiny plane) northeast of Auckland, New Zealand, falls firmly into the latter category: With a permanent population of approximately 1,000 people, the island has no municipal water or electricity supplies and no sewage treatment facilities, meaning every home there has to be self-sufficient. ▶



Story by Jeremy Hansen
Photos by Patrick Reynolds

The cedar-clad home designed by Herbst Architects faces the Pacific Ocean, tucked behind sand dunes from the sparsely populated Medlands Beach.

Some people would be daunted by the challenge, but South African–born architects Lance and Nicola Herbst relished an opportunity to design something completely off the grid. The couple first visited New Zealand in the mid-1990s and were enchanted not only by Great Barrier Island's isolation and spectacular white-sand beaches, but by what Lance describes as "little timber shacks we had never experienced before—tiny buildings with 20 years' accretion of stuff." In New Zealand, these shacks are called "bachs" (pronounced "batches") because they were historically designed for bachelors. Nowadays, the word is used to describe any sort of vacation home, no matter how lavish. The Herbsts, however, strive to inform their design with the implicit modesty of the term.

Three years after their first visit, the Herbsts moved permanently to New Zealand. They purchased land on Medlands Beach, on the island's east coast, and built a small bach there. The intimate knowledge they developed of the area put them in good stead when, in 2005, their friend Marc Lindale asked them to design his vacation home on a 9,250-square-foot site a little farther down the same beach.

Lance says the lack of services on the island meant the home's design became "a diagram of the basic provision of shelter," not unlike early bachs. This straightforward approach was aided by their decision to dispense with the patterns of city life in favor of predominantly outdoor living in the island's subtropical climate. There is no front door to the home, just a few steps up to the space that serves as its heart: a covered terrace with a large dining table, backed by a gabion wall made from local stone. Behind it is a slim two-story structure containing the home's two bedrooms and only bathroom; reaching toward the beach is a longer structure housing the compact kitchen, dining, and living areas. At the rear is another deck with a bench designed for filleting the day's catch of fish for dinner. The building's pine frame sits on a base of concrete blocks and is clad in cedar.

With no water supply, the roof was designed to collect the island's plentiful rainfall and store it in an underground tank for drinking and washing. Another tank stores treated waste water for irrigation of the site.

Inside, all electricity needs were assessed and edited by an electrical engineer to minimize demand on the four 150-watt solar panels installed on the roof. The Herbsts took a threefold approach to keeping the amount of power the home uses to a minimum: "Firstly, by providing targeted task lighting," explains Lance, "Secondly, by creating a low-lit ambience, which diverts attention to the night sky; and thirdly, by necessitating the use of candles and Coleman lanterns, which are rituals associated with camping and traditional bachs, many of which relied totally on candles for light."



The Herbsts also disconnected the oven's electric grill and Lindale banished the toaster after discovering that both would require energy surges the solar panels could not deliver. "It takes a mind-set shift for people who come from the city," Lance says. "You need to be cognizant that every time you turn something on, the power has to come from somewhere." Compromises had to be reached over the television and the dishwasher, two things Lindale insisted on but the Herbsts opposed. Luckily, the architects located low-energy versions of both appliances.

All in all, the home's simplicity makes it a convincing modern rendition of the improvisational shacks the Herbsts admired when they first visited the island. The surprising thing is how this pared-down approach has made living in the home feel much more like a pleasure than a chore. "City houses have become machines for living, and there's less and less humanity to them," Lance says. "Here, we were looking to sacrifice convenience and create delight." ▸



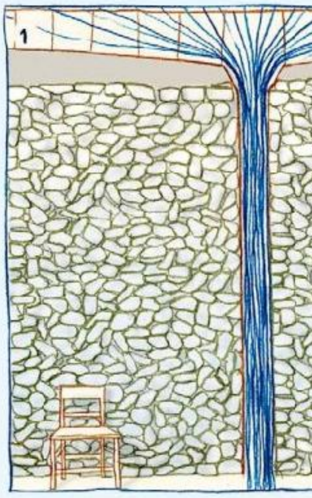
The Herbsts designed the home with a covered terrace (top) to encourage outdoor living in the island's temperate climate. The outdoor room (bottom) is backed by a gabion wall made of stone. Rainwater runs off the roofs into a channel before being funneled through pipes concealed within it to an underground concrete tank. ❶

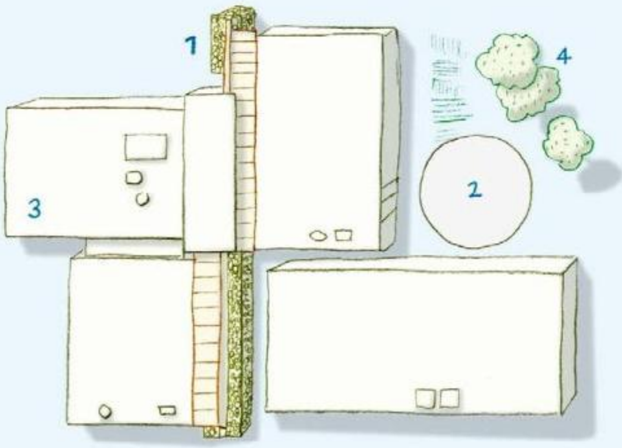
Blame It On the Rain

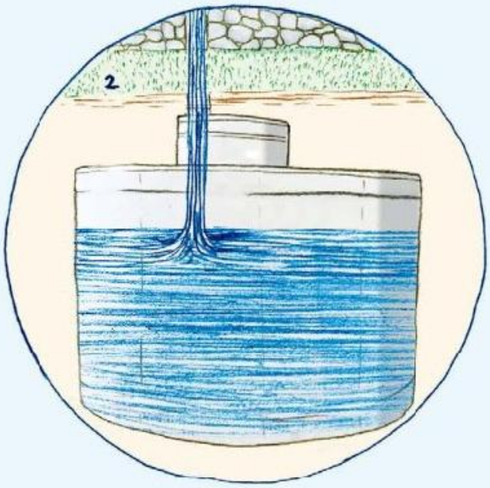
The home's water collection system makes capturing and storing fresh water so simple that you wonder why cities need a municipal supply at all. In fact, households in rural parts of New Zealand have used a similar system for generations. Great Barrier Island, along with much of northern New Zealand, has plentiful rainfall, so there is rarely a shortage of water.

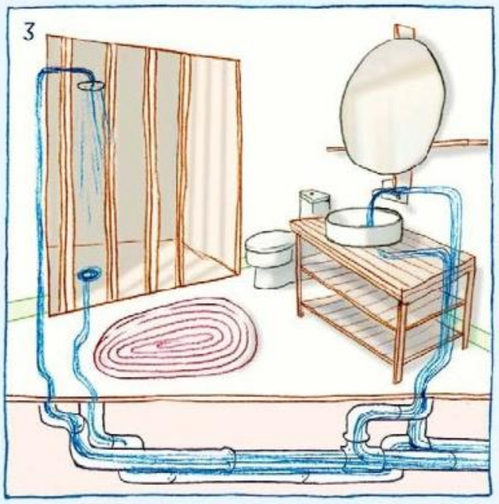
The roofs of the home's two pavilions were designed to drain rainwater into a channel on top of the central stone wall. This wall conceals twin acrylic downpipes **[1]** that funnel the water to a 6,000-gallon concrete tank **[2]** that was buried on the site before construction of the home began. Leaf filters collect any debris from neighboring trees before the water enters the tank. The lightless concrete tank prevents bacteria from flourishing and keeps the water cool.

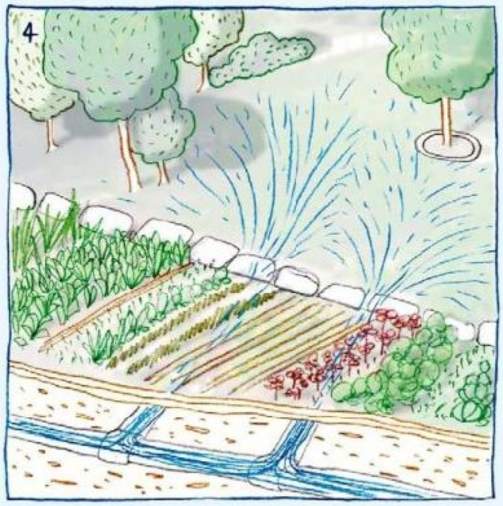
When needed, water gets back to the home with the assistance of a 240-volt pump that's fueled by electricity from the home's solar panels. Wastewater is drained to the onsite septic tank **[3]**, which treats waste with naturally occurring anaerobic bacteria, then releases it to a drainage field consisting of long, slender porous channels buried in the lawn **[4]**. The hoses allow the waste to seep into the soil to irrigate and fertilize the grass and plants.











Illustrations by Lief Parsons

Click here:
To learn more about rainwater harvesting, check out: harvestingrainwater.com and greywaterguerillas.com.


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If you chase long afternoons lolling by the pool, with longer evenings of the same, there is only one piece of furniture on your mind. Ours too.

Americans have long butchered foreign tongues, and no language has gotten it in the neck quite so badly as French. Though our Canadian neighbors *parlez-vous* from time to time, it hasn't mattered one whit. Be it the over-Frenchification of certain Yanks who store their mem-whaws in their arm-whaws to the over-Americanizing of that fine school in South Bend, Noter Daym, we chew up and spit out *la belle langue* like an oversalted plate of freedom frites. And little sounds tinnier to a furniture aficionado than a Midwestern drawl or a clipped New Englander's patter wrapping itself around the undisputed don of outdoor relaxation: the Chaze Lounge. Long gone is the lingual *longue* of the French *chaise longue* (literally "long chair") in favor of a pronunciation as lazy as the lounger.

In the language dodge this is called an "eggcorn" (after a commonly misheard variant on "acorn"), an incorrect or bowdlerized term of art that sticks around because, well, it kind of makes sense—after all, what ought one do on a chaise longue but lounge? And, thus, an American seating classic, as well as a fraught debate among hidebound grammarians, clucking Frenchmen, and serious poolside revelers was born. The identity crisis continues, but one thing is clear: For all the semantic simpering, when the sun is out, there's no place we'd rather be.

The Look of Longue

Vintage Chaise



By Henry Hall Designs / Stainless steel base with resin seat / Available in white, bronze, and bamboo / 33.5" H x 28.25" W x 68" L / $4,900 / henryhalldesigns.com

Expert Opinion: This chaise is challenging for the vertically challenged—like me, at 5'4". There is one sweet spot on this chair, and if you miss it, you're sliding down into the scoop. Aesthetically this chaise is a real winner, but because it's in a fixed position, there's only one way to really sit in it. For me this is a far better chaise to look at than to relax in.

What We Think: At nearly five grand and a bulky 92 pounds, this beautifully clean white curve is perhaps better suited to the NBA-size frame and pocketbook. But if you've got the stature and you don't mind lugging it from poolside to the barbecue, its sculptural form is pure California.

Special thanks to Flora Grubb for providing shoot location.

Story by Aaron Britt
Portrait by Aya Brackett



A Note on Our Expert
Kathleen Walsh is the founder and head designer of the Los Angeles-based design firm Walteria Living, which was established in 2004. Walsh and her staff of five specialize in usually clever, often ironic, and always L.A.-manufactured objects whose sense of beauty is as tart as their sense of fun is mischievous. Because of her design sense, we sought Walsh's take on our quintet of outdoor chaises, though it quickly became clear that her opinions were informed by both her career and that uncanny Angeleno sense of precisely what one ought to be laying on next to the pool. ▸

1966 Adjustable Chaise Lounge

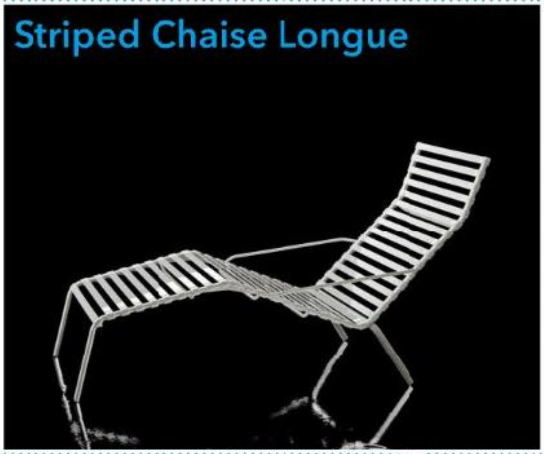


By Richard Schultz Design / Cast aluminum with vinyl coated polyester mesh / 14.5" H x 25.5" W x 76" L /Available in white, camel, onyx, silver, and chestnut / $3,275 / richardschultz.com

Expert Opinion: The Richard Schultz chaise reminds me of a David Hockney painting—all those wonderful colors—and living in L.A. next to a pool. It's just perfect. It feels like vacation. It also manages to have the fewest parts necessary, which I really respect.

What We Think: The Schultz is undoubtedly the classic of the lot, and though we'd be enamored purely based on aesthetics, the light frame and wheels make us want to drag this chaise with us everywhere we go. In production since 1966, the Adjustable Chaise Lounge has also benefited from more than 40 years of tinkering and small upgrades since its debut.

Striped Chaise Longue



By the Bouroullec brothers for Magis / Steel tube frame with polyamide slats / Available in green, blue, white, and black, with gray or brown cushions / 33.5" H x 26.8" W x 58.9" L / $704 / magisdesign.com

Expert Opinion: This one's definitely aesthetically pleasing, but it's not a great departure from the classic pool chaise. It's more about materials—especially the plastic strips which have this really luscious, Jolly Rancher candy quality that I like—than form. It has a very modern materiality, but there's not a lot new being said here, nothing is being reinterpreted.

What We Think: Though it does hearken back to chaises of yore, the lightweight but sturdy slats provide ample support against sagging under the weight of the sitter and cracking under the glare of the sun. And as a relatively affordable option, the Striped collection offers a lot of design bang for your buck.

Veneto Stackable Chaise Longue



By Unopiu for Design Within Reach / Teak frame with WaProLace (polyethylene fiber) netting / 11.75" H x 27.5" W x 76.5" L / $1,400 / dwr.com

Expert Opinion: To me this one is like Swiss Family Robinson meets chic Topanga Canyon. Out of all of the chaises, this one is the most aesthetically appealing to me. It's the least slick, the least about flashy technology. It's about nice, organic materials you actually want to be and live around. The Veneto has an elegant, but really rough-hewn quality, like you are stranded on some modernist desert island in a gauzy tennis dress.

What We Think: Though it does resemble a tennis net strung across a teak frame, we appreciate the Veneto's versatility. Unlike most of the chaises here, one could conceivably roll completely over, or, God forbid, lie on one's stomach. Those in it for the long lounge can also look forward to nice waffle patterns across the backs of their thighs.

MVS Chaise



By Maarten Van Severen for Vitra / Polyurethane foam in either stainless-steel or chrome base and leather or foam head pillow / Available in black or bright red / 34.25" H x 18" W x 60.75" L / $2,835-3,135 / vitra.com

Expert Opinion: I really feel like I'm at the psychiatrist's office on this one. When it's back in shrink mode you feel really well supported, and when you're up, perched in cool and casual mode, you do, too. The materials strike me as a bit institutional, which limited my expectations, but this chaise is quite well balanced. This is a good one.

What We Think: We love the two positions this chaise affords: fully reclined and sitting up. But it's so narrow that we don't know where to put our arms. Go for the stainless-steel base and polyurethane pillow if you're storing yours outdoors as they're most likely to stand up to a little inclement weather. In terms of versatility, the MVS holds its own indoors as well.

CELEBRATE MODERN HOMES AT PORTLAND'S STREET OF EAMES TOUR

Portland will be celebrating modern design this spring with its fourth annual modern home tour called "Street of Eames." A mix of seven distinctive mid-century and contemporary modern homes will be open for one day to raise money for after-school enrichment programs for homeless students at two Portland public elementary schools.

Advance tickets with donation on sale now. General admission tickets on sale February 16, 2009. Tickets are only available online.

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Environa Studio



"Building a freestanding prefab home is, in a sense, building a green SUV: You're greening up the wrong thing."





For the past 23 years, Sydney-based architects Tone Wheeler and Jan O'Connor of Environa Studio have experimented with the vocabulary of modern design—inspired both by prefab assembly and by the legendarily balmy Australian climate. Open walls, multiple layers of sun-shading screens, and even mobile kitchens figure prominently in their compact, crisply defined spaces.

To date, Environa has worked in planning, landscape, urban renovation, and architecture—sometimes all at once—and at almost every level of occupation, from apartments and multi-unit residences through to whole development masterplans.

We caught up with Wheeler and O'Connor for a brief but enthusiastic conversation during their recent trip through San Francisco.



Photos by Tim Wheeler/Wheeler Studios (Smith Street, Little Green Island)

Story by Geoff Manaugh

Residential projects by Environa Studio include the Smith Street house in Manly (top right), the e3 home (center left and right), and a holiday retreat on Little Green Island.

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One of the things you mentioned last year when you spoke at Dwell on Design was that architects can influence how a building's future residents will dress: Open walls, radiant heat, and internal courtyards can all affect what the inhabitants might choose to wear. How do you comfortably bridge that gap between clothing and architecture?

Tone Wheeler: A house is really just the outer layer of clothing. You can think of it as being an adaptable, adjustable, flexible piece of clothing. A house then becomes part of a lifestyle—and good architecture can *improve* that lifestyle. For instance, a passive solar home is physically more comfortable than air-conditioning—because you've got radiant heating and cooling—but it's also more sustainable.

There's an old saying that a passive house requires an active occupant. The downside of that is that you have to interact with the house, which can become tedious; the upside is that the house, with its series of layers—from curtains and blinds to windows, doors, and even storm shutters—becomes more interesting and more fun. What you wear can change, but so does your whole lifestyle.

Jan O'Connor: Something I don't see much in the United States is layers of sun screens and shading devices—we do a lot of that in Australia.

TW: But the energy codes now are obsessed with energy use, encouraging well-insulated, closed boxes instead of focusing on the end goal, which is thermal comfort. Comfort is not so easy to regulate!



Some of your work also integrates mobile furniture and even mobile cooktops in the kitchen.

JO: The mobile kitchen was actually for an ideas project called House of the Future. We've used that principle not just in furniture but also in flexible walls, adjustable windows and doors, roofs that can fold back, and spaces that can be screened.

TW: And that extends all the way from the very edge of the project, with the outdoor landscape.

JO: We try to allow a certain amount of flexibility in our projects. You're not using the same room in the same way 365 days of the year. The house is flexible enough that you can use one room in the evening and one in the morning—or you can adjust the spaces so that they're used at different times of day and even different times of year. It goes down to the modernist tradition of furniture that's light and easy to move.

Sustainability needs to go beyond just materials and energy use; we need to start thinking about density, size, flexibility—fitting more things into smaller spaces. Everything would be small and compact—but everything would fold out at full size.

TW: For instance, we're now doing what we call "six-packs": We take a single house out and replace it with six dwellings, whether apartments or townhouses. The freestanding home has almost had its day. It's over. Building a freestanding prefab home is, in a sense, building a green SUV: You're greening up the wrong thing. We need to be looking at two-, four-, and six-pack housing, where every house still has access to soil, to ground to grow things, and to a personal identity. That's where I think prefab and modularity could really play a part.

You've also pointed out that when someone says their house is 100 years old, it's only the walls that are 100 years old: The kitchen is brand-new, the floors were redone last decade, and the bathrooms were all replaced five years ago.



TW: Bathrooms and kitchens are always what people want to replace. They wear out quickly or they get shabby; cabinets are just torn out and sent to the landfill. To me that's the leading edge of unsustainability—that we build very poor bathrooms and kitchens, because all of them need to be replaced. At Environa, we try to make our kitchens and bathrooms—which, of course, will be out-of-date someday—easy to pull out, without much energy. You just unplug them.

But in Australia it's very interesting how the rise of the barbecue—men getting in touch with their inner beast by burning meat—is actually like you're seeing the birth of a mini-kitchen...

JO: An outdoor room...

TW: An outdoor kitchen! So we took that idea, and we got the very best of these barbecues, and we just wheeled it back into the house and we said, Here's the kitchen! [*laughs*] If you want to barbecue, you wheel it back outside. It's the same object parked in different rooms, provided you can plug it in, without a full renovation.

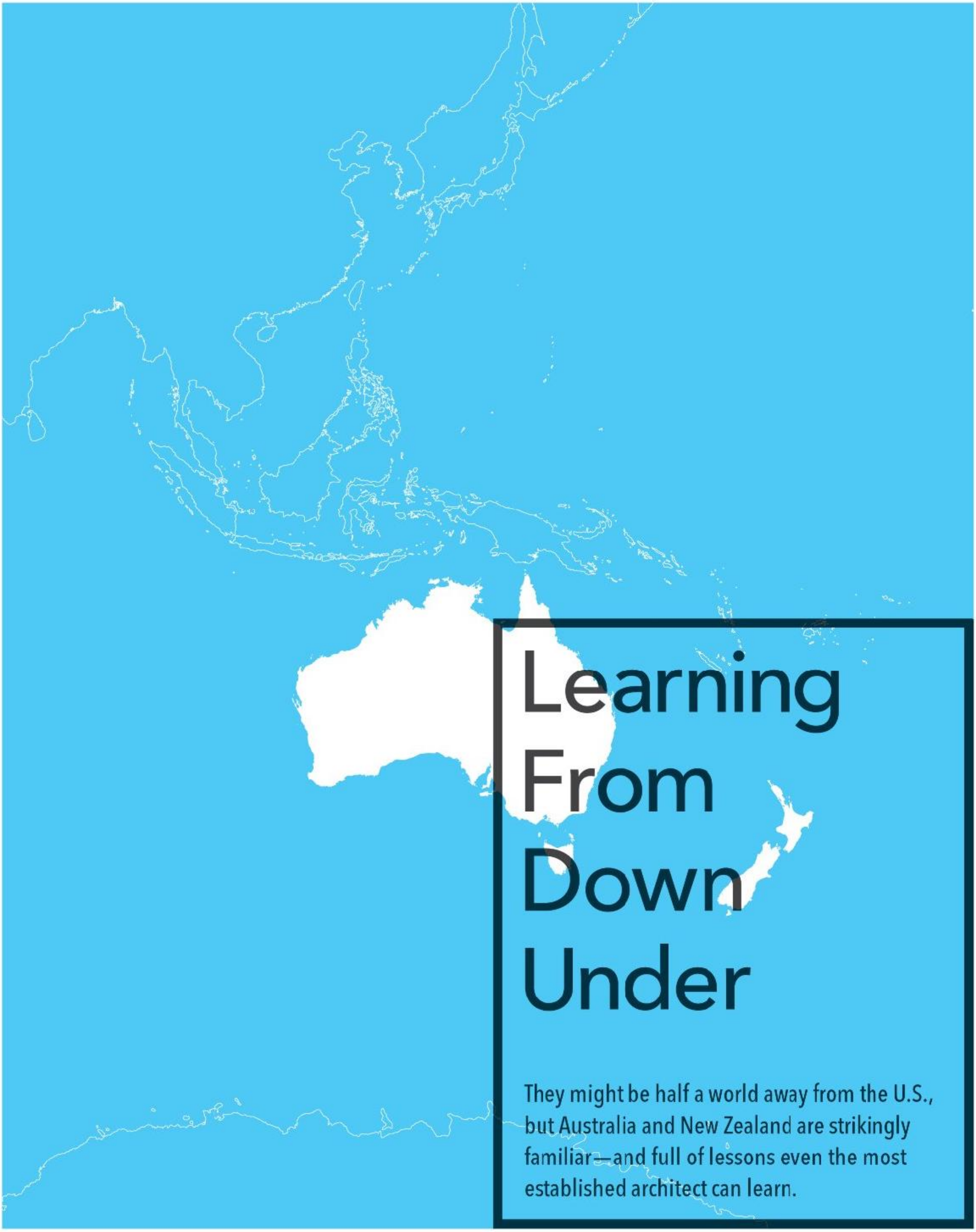
High-end barbecue equipment is the future of the modern kitchen?

TW: Barbecuing is a perfect example of people going back outdoors, with the doors open. It's a lifestyle.

That leads us back to the notion that living in your house *is a lifestyle*—and our architecture is about improving that lifestyle. Our houses are about quality of life.

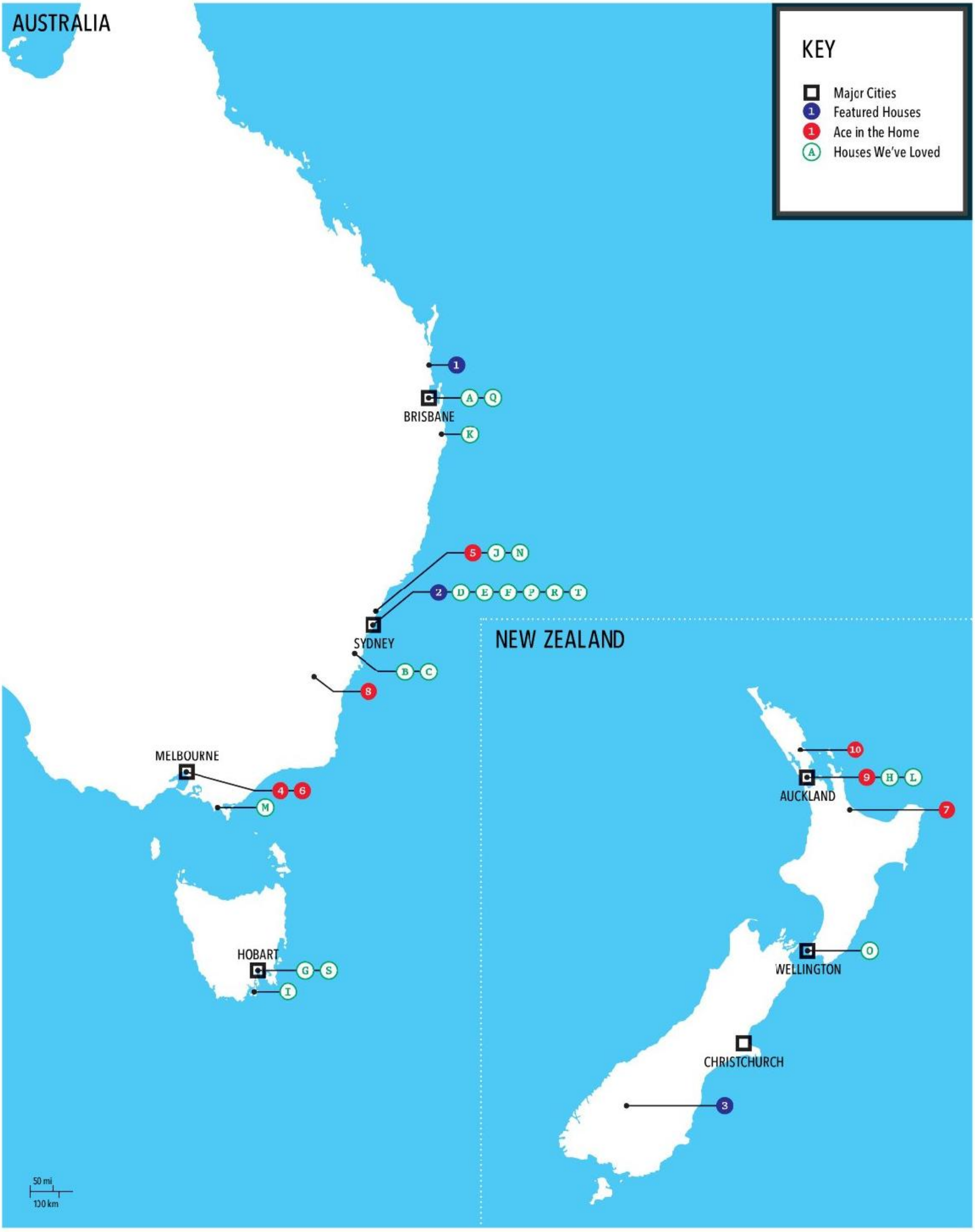
Photos by Tim Wheeler/Wheeler Studios

The architects describe their Smith Street project in Manly (top and bottom) as part of the firm's "continuing exploration of courtyard housing." Here, that courtyard is a massive two-story light well bringing fresh air into the home; a ground-floor kitchen opens an entire wall onto the outside for a cool—but private—place to eat.



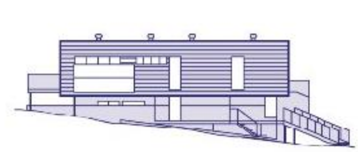
Learning From Down Under

They might be half a world away from the U.S., but Australia and New Zealand are strikingly familiar—and full of lessons even the most established architect can learn.

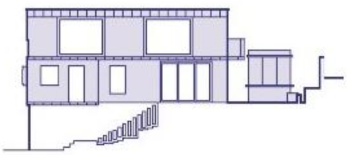

AUSTRALIA
KEY
Major Cities
Featured Houses
Ace in the Home
Houses We've Loved
BRISBANE
SYDNEY
MELBOURNE
HOBART
NEW ZEALAND
AUCKLAND
WELLINGTON
CHRISTCHURCH
50 mi
100 km

Featured Houses: Pages 78–101

Three of our best houses yet take us on a sustained southern trip through the moving walls and sunscreens of residential architecture Down Under. Walk the wraparound verandas, steps, and decking of these three houses, from the mountains to the coasts, all tailor-made for modern living.



1 Noosa, Australia
Bark House Architects
pp. 78–85



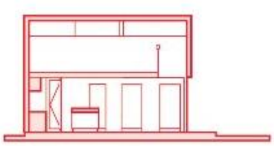
2 Balmain Point, Australia
Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects
pp. 86–93



3 Queenstown, New Zealand
Kerr Ritchie Architects
pp. 94–101

Ace in the Home: Pages 102–114

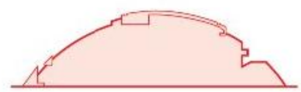
Because three houses would never be enough, we've assembled this roundup of seven more inspiring homes. Broken spheres and irregular additions mix it up with incredible woodwork and the ever-present shutter, revealing the true dimensions of domestic space on the other side of the world.



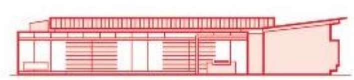
4 Fitzroy, Australia
Andrew Maynard Architects
pp. 102–103



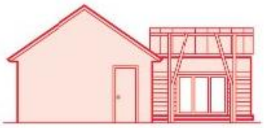
5 Freshwater Beach, Australia
Chenchow Little Architects
pp. 104–106



6 Hawthorn, Australia
McBride Charles Ryan
p. 106



7 Tauranga, New Zealand
Herbst Architects
p. 108



8 Queanbeyan, Australia
Dennis Formiatti Architect
p. 108



9 Auckland, New Zealand
Stevens Lawson Architects
p. 110



10 Mangawhai, New Zealand
Strachan Group Architects
pp. 112–114

As the need to live sustainably becomes increasingly urgent—getting more from less, like true modernists—the countries Down Under present a particularly interesting test case. From water shortages and urban sprawl to living in harmony with spectacular landscapes, Australia and New Zealand are more than just fantastic tourism destinations: They are exemplary lands from which even the most seasoned architects and designers can pick up new ideas and skills. The houses on these pages are so good we just had to show them off once again.

Appendix: Houses We've Loved

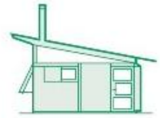
Since our premiere issue, we've fallen in love with houses from all over the planet—but even we were surprised to see how many of them were in Australia and New Zealand. It seemed time to devote a whole issue to these countries—and this index to homes in previous issues helps to show why.



(A) Brisbane, Australia
Alice Hampson
December 2000



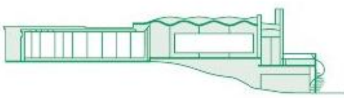
(B) Kangaroo Valley, Australia
Glenn Murcutt
June 2001



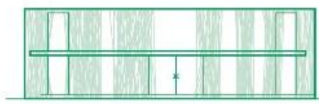
(C) Riversdale, Australia
Glenn Murcutt
August 2001



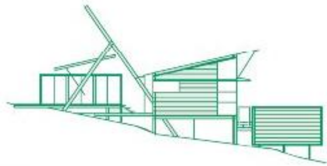
(D) Sydney, Australia
Harry Seidler
August 2001



(E) Sydney, Australia
Hugh Buhrich
May 2003



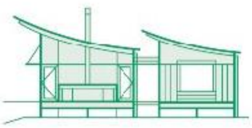
(F) Unbuilt (Sydney, Australia)
Collins and Turner Architects
July/August 2003



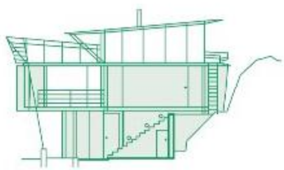
(G) Hobart, Tasmania
1+2 Architecture
September 2003



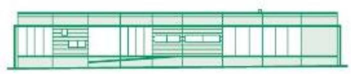
(H) Auckland, New Zealand
Patrick Clifford
October 2003



(I) Bruny Island, Tasmania
1+2 Architecture
April/May 2005



(J) Great Mackerel Beach, Australia
Dawson Brown Architecture
July/August 2005



(K) Myocum, Australia
James Grose
December/January 2006



(L) Auckland, New Zealand
Architectus
April 2006



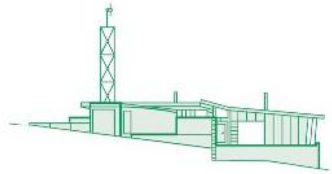
(M) Victoria, Australia
Daniel Holan Architects
May 2006



(N) Dangar Island, Australia
Sue Harper
November 2006



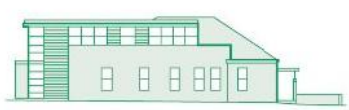
(O) Wellington, New Zealand
Architecture Workshop
December/January 2007



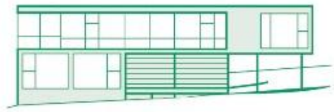
(P) Sydney, Australia
Joel Farnan and Michelle Findlay
March 2007



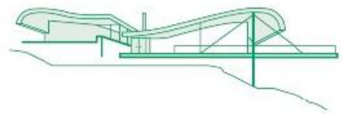
(Q) Brisbane, Australia
Kevin Hayes Architects
July/August 2007



(R) Sydney, Australia
Steve Kennedy
November 2007



(S) Kingston, Tasmania
room11
May 2008



(T) Sydney, Australia
Harry Seidler
June 2008



Few people would spend their life savings on a plot of land they'd never seen. Two exceptions are Adrienne Webb and Stefan Dunlop, who, while living in a loft in London, snapped up an acre of land in northeastern Australia, 10,000 miles away. "In some ways, we're a bit impulsive," says Dunlop, a New Zealand–born painter, in what is clearly an understatement. They were also homesick: After six years in "gray, grimy" London, they longed for the idyllic weather and breathtaking natural beauty of Australia, where they'd lived previously and where Webb, an investment planner, grew up. Ready to have children of their own, they wanted to be closer to their families.

Dunlop's parents, who lived in Brisbane, took up the case and found the couple some land atop a wooded ridge above Noosa, a stylish beach town on Australia's northeastern coast. "It was obviously a cracking site," Dunlop says now, gesturing off his deck to a rolling sea of bright green eucalyptus, sloping for miles down to an ocean dotted with yachts and freighters. Despite the giant leap of faith required, it was something of a risk-free investment: Dunlop's parents were so enamored of the property that they vowed to buy it if the couple balked.

A few months later, when Dunlop was in Sydney for an exhibition of his paintings, he hopped a plane to Noosa to check out their purchase. He was thrilled. When he wandered next door to introduce himself to his future neighbors, he was pleased to ▸

Site Unseen

Story by Jaime Gross
Photos by Richard Powers

An unvisited ocean-facing plot of land, a couple of architect neighbors, and one giant leap of faith have netted a pair of erstwhile Londoners a dream home of their own in northeast Australia.





1

Project: Tinbeerwah House
Architect: Bark Design Architects
Location: Noosa, Australia

The Tinbeerwah house and studio (opposite) keep a low profile among the site's eucalyptus trees. Stefan Dunlop and Adrienne Webb repose on their front entrance stairs with their sons Keanu and Kobe (opposite, bottom right). A large deck off the living room overlooks the hills of Noosa and the Pacific Ocean.

The open-plan living room was inspired by the couple's previous residence, a London loft. The paintings are by Dunlop while the chandelier and most of the furniture are from London flea markets and eBay. The louvered floor-to-ceiling windows, ceiling fan, and sliding deck doors usher in sea breezes and encourage good air circulation.

discover two of the eight-person firm Bark Design Architects. When the principals Lindy Atkin and Stephen Guthrie learned who he was, they were keen to design his future house. Atkin's and Guthrie's enthusiasm was somewhat self-serving—"We were terrified of having to look out on a big-block mansion or a Tuscan bunker," Guthrie admits—but also big-hearted. Unlike many of their neighbors, who'd erected tall fences at the edges of their property, the architects were determined to preserve the scenic views from the road, a popular route for cyclists and drivers. "We wanted our architecture to 'give back' to the street," as Guthrie puts it. Dunlop liked them immediately, and a collaboration was born.

The architects' brief was to create a warm and airy three-bedroom house for a growing family and to preserve some of the elements the couple loved about warehouse living, including an open plan and soaring 16-foot ceilings. Dunlop also wanted a painting studio with natural lighting, raw plywood walls, and an extra-tall roof to accommodate his larger works. To help steer the design, the couple put together a scrapbook of images that inspired them and sent it to the architects: tear sheets from design magazines of houses they loved, Polaroids of mid-century-modern furniture, fixtures they'd purchased at London flea markets (along with measurements, so the architects could design the rooms to fit), and photographs of Dunlop's paintings, "to show that the artwork came first, and furnishings ▸







> "We were terrified of having to look out on a big-block mansion or a Tuscan bunker."
>
> Stephen Guthrie

In his detached painting studio (below), Dunlop considers a work in progress. The building is oriented east-west to avoid direct sunlight, and the long, narrow shape enables the artist to get some distance from his paintings as he works. An oversize front door and angled ceiling accommodate extra-large canvases; the plywood walls and floor can ably endure a beating, or, as is more likely, stray splashes of paint. The studio (opposite, top right) is clad in corrugated tin, echoing the adjacent water-storage tanks, which collect and filter rainwater off the roof. Batten screens of spotted gum wood sheath the house (opposite, bottom right) and allow ventilation into the outdoor storage area (opposite, bottom left), a nod to traditional Queensland architecture.

second, and that the paintings weren't necessarily going to match the couch," says Webb. "When all that '50s and '60s California-style stuff came over, we were like, 'Yes!'" Atkins recalls, clapping her hands in delight. "We love that aesthetic, too. That's when we knew this was going to work out beautifully."

After an intensive eight-month design process, however, the project hit a snag: Construction costs had skyrocketed in the intervening months, and the bids coming back from the builders were beyond the couple's budget. Rather than ask the architects to downscale and redraw the plans, Webb and Dunlop got creative with their approach. "Once you've been shown the best, it's hard to scale your expectations back," he explains. "At that point, we'd bend over backward to make it happen." What they did do—become their own lead contractor—was no less gymnastic. Webb, eight months pregnant, sat through the required owner-builder exams and handled all the subcontracting. Meanwhile Dunlop, along with his father, chipped in with labor, prepping the foundation and laying slate tiles by day and then, pressed by a deadline for an upcoming exhibition, painting in a ramshackle milking shed on a nearby dairy farm late into the night.

Because they were first-time builders and their architects' office was only 25 feet away, the couple stopped in daily, peppering the duo with questions. "The engineering side was really tough to get our heads around," explains Dunlop. "We probably drained them more than the average client." (The architects concur.) "It was fully stressful," Dunlop says. "Adrienne and I were both running on empty by the end of it. We got to a point where we just said to the tradesmen, 'Okay, that's it—no more money, no more work.' We moved in with a lot still left to complete and spent the past few years tinkering away on weekends."

The final product—essentially a steel-framed glass box clad in strips of spotted gum timber and sheets of fiber cement—is a modern take on traditional Queensland architecture, raised off the ground to allow for plenty of storage beneath (the family uses the space to dry laundry, store firewood, and park their classic red Mercedes).

It's also built to be as sustainable as possible. Their tap water comes from rainwater collected off the roof and is stored in corrugated iron tanks, and septic waste is processed onsite and used to irrigate their garden. In keeping with passive solar principles, the layout encourages natural ventilation, and an overhanging roof allows direct sunlight to penetrate the house in the winter but keeps things cool in the summer. A square plunge pool, inspired by the concrete São Paulo houses the couple included in their "brainstorm book," throws shimmering light patterns on the living-room ceiling and cools northeast breezes on their way from the ocean to the house—it can also be used as a firefighting water source in a region prone to bush fires. ▸

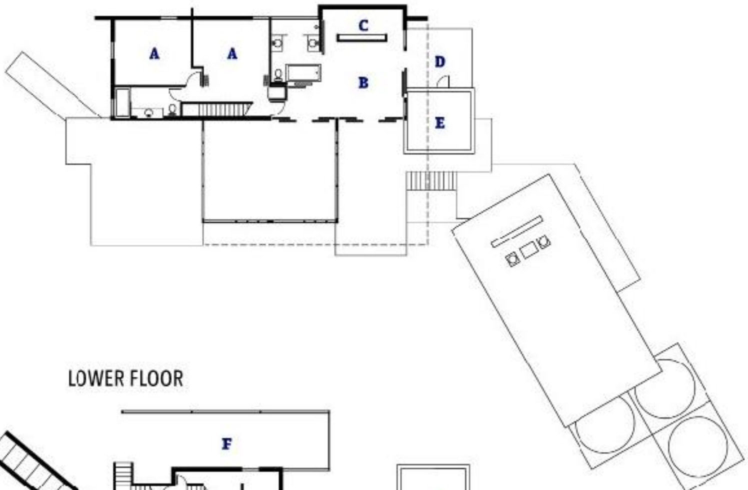


TINBEERWAH HOUSE

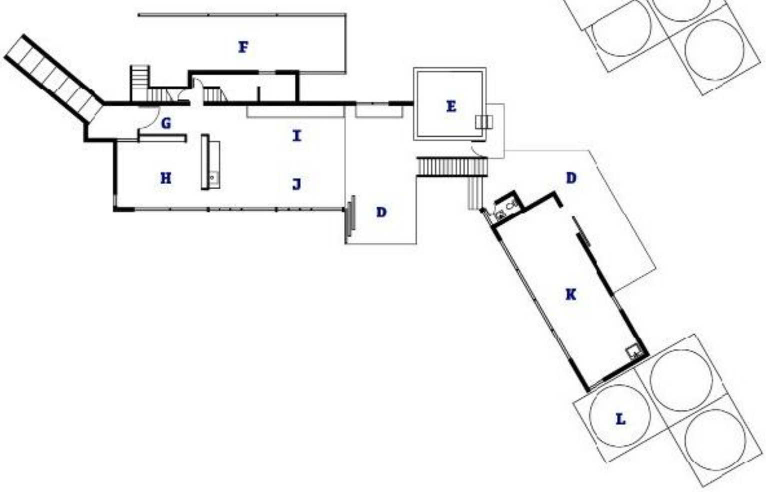
FLOOR PLANS

A Bedroom
B Master Bedroom
C Walk-In Closet
D Deck
E Pool
F Carpark
G Entry
H Library
I Kitchen
J Living/Dining Area
K Studio
L Water Tanks

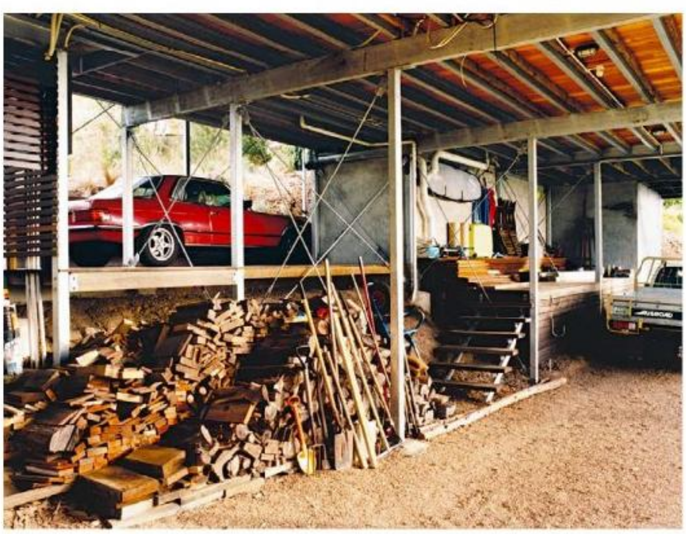
UPPER FLOOR

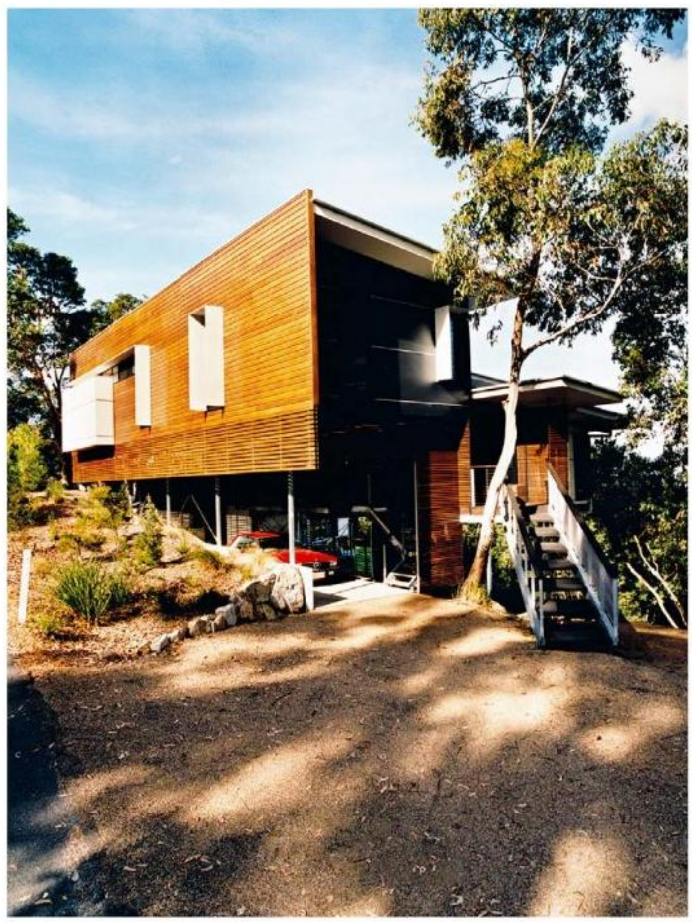


LOWER FLOOR









The house strikes an elegant balance between transparency and privacy. The loftlike great room—combining kitchen, dining room, and living room—opens onto an intimate, enclosed study. In the master bedroom a custom cedar-and-tatami sliding screen of Webb's design covers an opening in the bedroom wall; when pulled aside, it reveals a bird's-eye view of the living room and kitchen below. Gigantic, thoughtfully placed windows frame views of the vast surrounding landscape—yet provide privacy from the architects' adjacent studio—while generous stretches of gallery-white walls offer plenty of display space for Dunlop's art. A sense of interconnectedness reigns: The master bathroom flows seamlessly into the bedroom, and the concrete pool on the living room deck is also accessible, if you're brave, by a leap from one on the second floor.

Despite the agonies of the building process, Webb, as much as she loves the finished product, swears she wouldn't do it again. From their glass-walled studio next door, the architects frequently spy drivers stopping to take pictures of the home and the view beyond. Dunlop says their friends love the way the house showcases the eclectic furniture and "bits and bobs" they've picked up over the years. They may only be recovering from their exhaustion now, one house, another baby, and one hyperactive puppy later, but in Dunlop's eyes, it was all worth it: "When you're designing your own home, you've really got to go for it there's no other time."







The serene all-white bathroom (opposite, bottom) can be sealed off from the master bedroom by two sliding doors, or left open for a loftlike feel. Webb surveys the view from the "lookout deck" off the bedroom (opposite top), and Dunlop demonstrates the deck's secondary use: as a launching pad into the concrete plunge pool on the first floor. ⓘ



A Measured Approach

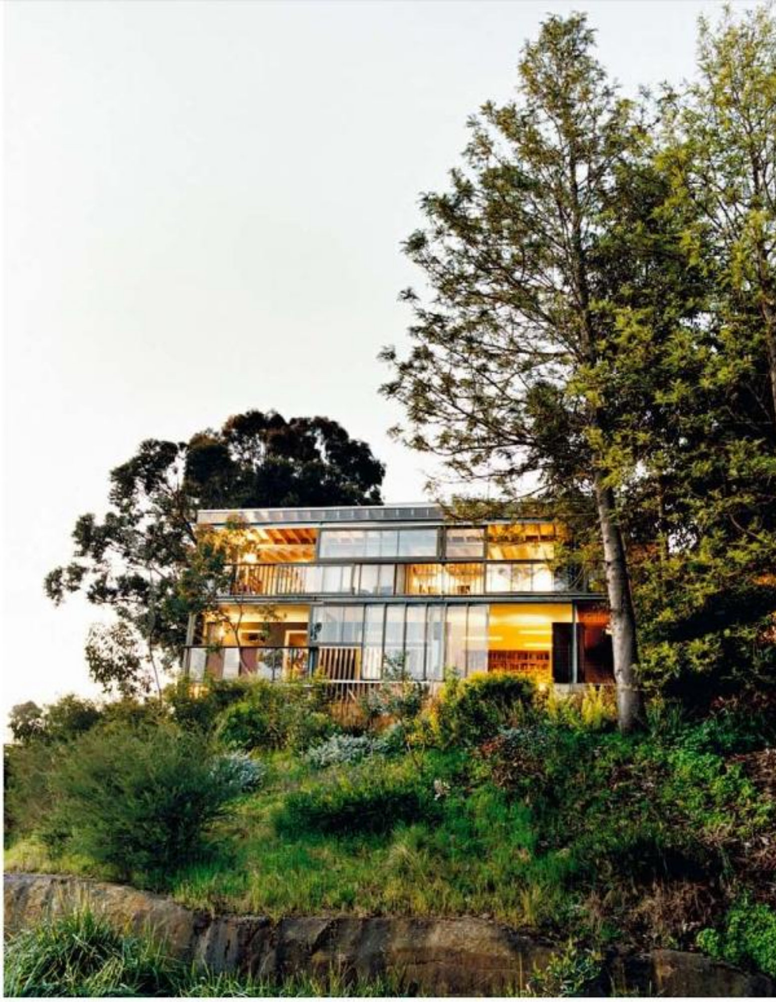
Story by Marcus Trimble
Photos By Roger D'Souza

Utterly dynamic, this house on an urban peninsula in Sydney is rich with inventive and thoughtfully considered spaces. Walls become windows and screens slide shut to repel (or entice) the changing weather.

The outside steps of the Zulaikha-Laurence house in Sydney's suburb of Balmain Point present an effective transition from the solid rock underfoot to the delicate structure of the house beyond. This approach helps to define the singular space of the residence.

2

Project: Zulaikha-Laurence Residence
Architect: Tonkin Zulaikha Greer Architects
Location: Balmain Point, Australia





Balmain Point is one of Sydney's suburbs that is largely coastline. It is a wide peninsula severed from the landmass of the city by Victoria Road, an arterial stretch of dusty tarmac that otherwise connects the central business district with the west. Balmain is densely populated with terrace housing, small cottages, and industrial waterfront buildings; it is the kind of area whose working-class roots and bohemian characters make it ripe for gentrification. Indeed, over the last few years, the Balmain peninsula has seen a great deal of development. Much of its industrial heritage has disappeared, and the lean, economically planned housing stock has grown fat with multiple renovations.

However, the southern edge of the area has held its own much more gracefully than the north. In the north, Balmain Power Station once rivaled the south's White Bay Power Station for sheer awesomeness, with Constructivist conveyer belts spanning hundreds of meters at just the right angle to suggest that this, sir, would be the perfect venue for a major museum of contemporary art—but Balmain's station was instead knocked down to build apartments and townhouses of insulting banality.

Starting at the still-standing remnants of White Bay Station (its majesty prompting every citizen to hold an opinion on its proper reuse: It ought to be a school, a maritime museum, a fish market), past the open concrete apron that greets and unloads large freighters full of automobiles assembled in South Africa, and on to the water-police ▶



Exposed timber rafters (left) support the roof, which is peeled back at the rear of the site to draw in warmth from the northern sun. Inside, a suspended staircase rises up past the couple's bookcase over a well-lit eating nook. Aalto stools by Artek join Eames molded plywood dining chairs by Herman Miller to give an especially modern touch to the kitchen.



headquarters, the industrial fringe of Balmain finishes at a small public reserve. Overlooking this reserve is a small stone building, originally a gunpowder store and now the residence of architect Brian Zulaikha and artist Janet Laurence.

The store sits at the end of an extremely narrow pathway. Not only did this make construction difficult, it rules out having the newspaper delivered, and it also necessitates an approach to the house on foot—a slow and measured arrival that sets the tone for the house itself.

"I've actually lived on this street for 30 years, in three different houses," says Zulaikha. "It's charming and often used as a film set. I originally lived on a hill in a place that I subdivided, so I always knew this was here. Of course, there was no park here then, and it was used as a rubbish tip for the maritime services, but we used to climb through a hole in the fence and take the dog for walks around the area. When it came up for sale—it was owned by a chap in Los Angeles, incidentally—I knew it had potential."

Zulaikha and Laurence bought the property, built a kitchen, and camped downstairs for two years before undertaking any major work on the house. During this time, they planned their impending extensions. "I was determined that as much of it would be as open as possible," Zulaikha states, something they achieved through a series of sliding glazed doors that allow the outdoor rooms to be open, closed, and all variations in between.



The original masonry building establishes a general arrangement for the rest of the house, with kitchen and dining areas downstairs, living and bedroom above. A timber veranda is wrapped around two sides of this stone core, where an internal stair also doubles as a library, complete with built-in sofa and custom artwork. Poking its head out to the side, with a scrubby mop of greenery for a wig, there is a small bathhouse.

When I arrive, it is from up a series of staggered steps under the veranda, each step a separate concrete plinth, individually cast, they explain, with great difficulty. At the top is a space that seems to characterize much of this small house: open-air, covered overhead, and with external operable walls that might be closed for protection against the southerly winds while still maintaining a sense of being outside. "This sort of thing happens all the time," says Zulaikha. "Are you inside or are you outside? Well, on a cold day, you know you are outside!"

Although the house faces south—this being the southern hemisphere, where the sun strikes from the north—Zulaikha was not perturbed. "We lived in two houses while we built this one, and both of them had courtyards that faced north. We couldn't stand the heat. There were no screens, and the dog was out there sweltering because there was no shade to protect it. So I got to hate that direction a little bit! We did open the roof to catch some of the northern sun, though." ⊪





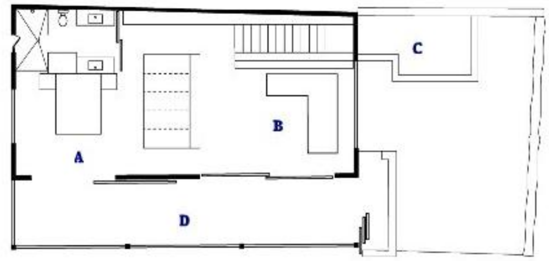
The sun cuts down into the upstairs bathroom through skylights (top right), casting rhythmic shadows of roof beams onto the floor and walls. The bathroom includes a cantilevered toilet by Catalano. On the main floor, the kitchen island (bottom right and opposite) is like Zulaikha's own version of a Donald Judd sculpture: minimal, freestanding, and geometric. The kitchen includes ceiling lights whose fittings are recessed and offset; their glow is both diffuse and elusive. ⓘ

ZULAIKHA-LAURENCE RESIDENCE

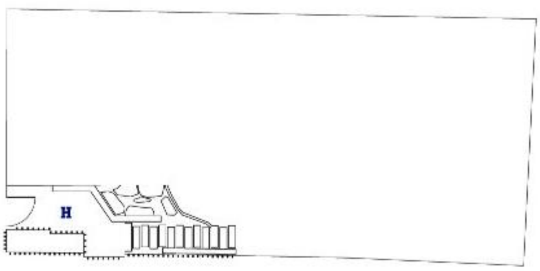
FLOOR PLANS

A Bedroom
B Living Room
C Roof Garden
D Deck
E Kitchen
F Dining Room
G Patio
H Entry

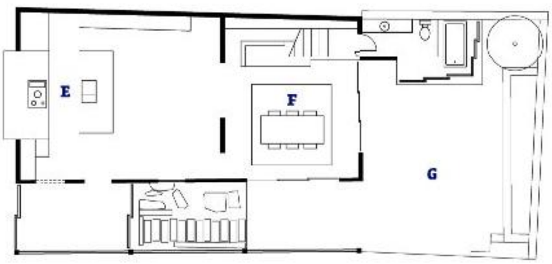
SECOND FLOOR



GROUND ENTRY



FIRST FLOOR





Zulaikha gestures to the window at the rear of the deep kitchen bench, looking west to the ANZAC Bridge, when he points out that the house is also now the venue for a fortnightly film club. Local film-industry friends bring around prerelease copies of movies. "We do a lot of entertaining, actually," Zulaikha says, "so the kitchen is a real focal point, and it opens out to this great view."

The house is also full of art. "There's nothing terribly directed about it, really, just things we have accumulated over the years," Zulaikha tries to explain—but he is somewhat unconvincing, given the wide array on display. Artwork by Jonathan Jones, in particular—purchased by the square meter and composed of lightbulbs and electrical cabling woven through the wall—dominates the stair landing while a cabinet at the top of the stairs holds a thousand wonders. After all, Janet Laurence herself is an artist, her work concerned with transparency, biology, memory, and the ephemeral.

While the house embodies the principles of her art practice in the thinness of its edges, changing surface qualities, and ability to capture the memory of its occupants through the accumulation of marks on its internal surfaces, like a rudimentary computer, Laurence has contributed to the house directly in at least two instances.

First is a set of painted sliding doors that leads to the upstairs living area. In contrast to the solid timber detailing, which has resonance with the home's sturdy industrial context, these glazed doors are washed with a light, milky paint—creating shadows suggestive of the ever-changing light off the harbor or of a guest sleeping on the veranda.

The second is a single piece of glass that marks the end of a wall in the downstairs bathroom, a far less obvious mark to leave and much more delightful as a result. As Zulaikha explains, the small brick wall leading into the bathroom was the only new masonry wall in the house; wanting an entirely glass bathhouse, Laurence was not supportive of the crudeness of a painted brick wall. In the end, the wall stayed, but a thin piece of clear glass was propped in place at the end of it. The glass is separated from the brick face by only an inch, suggestive of a glitch or a stray CAD line that was not deleted, describing an alternative endpoint for the wall.

The vertical timber elements on the veranda, while certainly an effective visual filter, are equally important in embedding the house within its context of harborside industrial infrastructure. The steady march of the wharf pilings on the opposite side of the harbor, as seen through these screens, knits the house into its context. "Janet and I wake up every morning, look out over our feet, and take note of the changing color of the harbor," says Zulaikha. "It is remarkable that it can change from day to day, from lilac to blue to green to pink."

This might be a house of movable walls and ever-changing screens, but it is this constant relationship with its site that binds the house to its city—and its owners, in turn, to it. ▮







The bedroom (opposite, top) contains an ingenious closet system similar to library stacks. These large sliding cabinets open up to make way for Zulaikha and Laurence as they hang their clothes or access anything else kept in storage. The glass and wood walls of the bathhouse (this page), like other retractable panels on the house, offer shade with a view. The veranda (opposite, bottom) looks out onto the harbor. ℹ

Nature Nurtured

Story by Jeremy Hansen
Photos by Stephen Oxenbury

On the shores of New Zealand's Lake Wakatipu, architects Bronwen Kerr and Pete Ritchie designed a relaxed family home that reclines into its spectacular landscape.



When Bronwen Kerr and Pete Ritchie (right) decided to relocate from New Zealand's capital, Wellington, to Queenstown, on the country's South Island, they designed a new home for themselves and their three children on a site Ritchie had purchased when he was living in the area—a stunning lakeside plot. Working in partnership, the couple devised a home and studio that is separated by a passage through the middle of the building (this page). The sunny side of the home (opposite) is clad in cedar weatherboards and features sleeping quarters on the upper level with living spaces below.

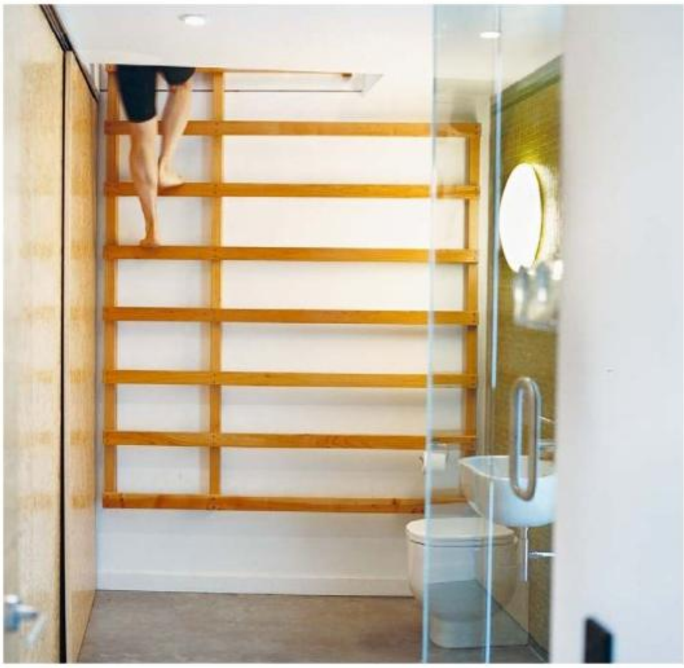


The gorgeous alpine region of Queenstown, on New Zealand's South Island, has always been popular with domestic visitors. But in recent years the area has seen an international tourism boom, fueled at least in part by *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, some of which was filmed here. The sumptuous vistas, excellent vineyards, and exhilarating sense of isolation make a handful of well-off visitors fall so in love with the place that they decide to stay. This phenomenon has spawned an architectural style best described as steroidal, with grandiose homes striving to assert their presence among all the spectacular scenery.

The profusion of megahomes—many of them occupied only a few months of the year—can become depressing. Luckily, a visit to the home of local architects Bronwen Kerr and Pete Ritchie and their children—Archie, seven; Linus, five; and Olive, three—is the perfect antidote to this rectilinear bravado. Here, the duo has dreamed up a building that doesn't try to compete with its spectacular surroundings but seems genuinely at ease in them. "We wanted to relax and let our house fit the landscape as if it's reclining into it," Kerr says. "Elements ▸

3

Project: Kerr-Ritchie Residence
Architect: Bronwen Kerr and Pete Ritchie
Location: Queenstown, New Zealand



"We gained confidence and tried a few things out. Our response to the landscape became more sophisticated, and the planning and the form gradually became more fluid, more of an intuitive response to the site."

One bathroom (above) features a ladder that leads up to a yoga studio. The kids (right), Archie, Linus, and Olive, stand in the kitchen, beneath the strand board–clad stairwell that leads to the bedrooms. Kerr and Ritchie initially envisaged rich materials for the interior, but changed their minds in favor of what they call a "cartoony" approach with cheaper, hard-wearing elements. "We didn't want the space to feel too grown-up," Kerr says.



Queenstown gets cold in winter, hence the installation of a sauna (left). Outside, the landscaping was kept deliberately casual, with rock walls and gravel paths. The home is made up of two parts (below): a rear wing containing the studio and a guest room, and the north-facing living quarters (which, in the southern hemisphere, attract the most sun) overlooking the lake.





appear to lounge and gaze out at the view. I like buildings that show human characteristics."

Good things take time, and there was nothing rushed about this place. Ritchie, who grew up a little south of Queenstown, was working in the area as a surveyor when he purchased the three-quarter-acre plot in 1999. The 15-minute drive south from Queenstown seemed inconvenient to most local people, but Ritchie thought the site made up for this by being more sheltered and sunny than most locations in town. The couple initially contemplated building a "small modernist box" on the site, but those plans were put on hold when they moved north to Wellington for five years so Ritchie could complete a degree in landscape architecture while Kerr continued working as an architect.

The land sat empty while the couple's plans for it slowly took shape. They started a family, with three children arriving over the next four years. They took note of the idiosyncratic work of the Japanese firm Atelier Bow-Wow. They admired the fluid and relaxed planning of Australian architect Kerstin Thompson, particularly a long, low lakeside home she designed near Melbourne that is an elegant geometric echo of the landscape around it. During their five years away, Kerr and Ritchie made regular visits to the Queenstown property, spending hours beside Lake Wakatipu considering their options. "Our thoughts developed, and the way we worked over that time developed too," Kerr says. "We gained confidence and tried a few things out. Our response to the landscape became more sophisticated, and the planning and the form gradually became more fluid, more of an intuitive response to the site."

The end result is a long way from the modernist box they initially envisaged. It is not a home that tries to hide by burying itself in its surroundings or by emulating one of the area's old barns, a strategy deployed by other local contemporary homes. It is relaxed but still rigorous, with a breezy unorthodoxy all its own. It seems to derive strength from its robust surroundings without attempting to outdo them. "I like our buildings to have a strong sculptural form," Ritchie says. "We didn't want a generic cultural interpretation like a barn or a box."

The 3,000-square-foot home is divided into two parts, linked by an open-air breezeway. To the right, the passage leads to the rear of the home, with a guest bedroom and bathroom and the studio where Kerr and Ritchie base their practice. To the left are the family quarters, including a large combined kitchen, dining, and living area with a small cedar-lined deck stretching northward to the lake. Up two steps is a snug lounge with a log burner, separated from the other living spaces by bookshelves backed with movable panels. The second floor houses three bedrooms and a bathroom, all with big windows facing the lake. On its eastern flank, the home pulls gently away from the slope to create space for a sheltered courtyard that catches the morning sun. There is no formal area for parking cars, so visitors pull up wherever they like at the end of the ▸

The home is mostly clad in black trapezoidal-profile steel, with cedar boards lining what the owners call the "human spaces"—external passages between buildings. A solar hot water system perches on the roof. Kerr Ritchie Architects' studio at the rear of the building (bottom right) opens onto a lawn on the lake side of the home. The form evolved during planning from a "modernist box" into a "strong, sculptural" frame.

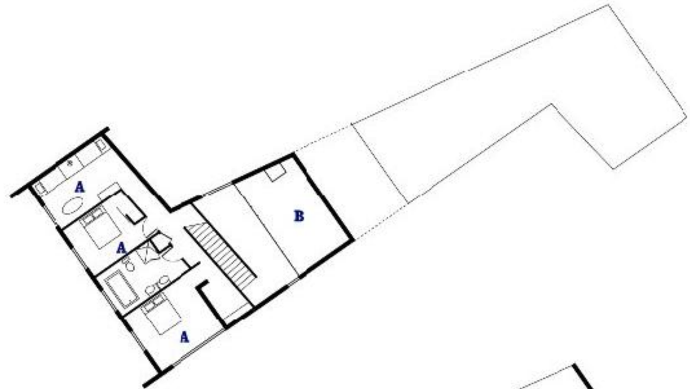




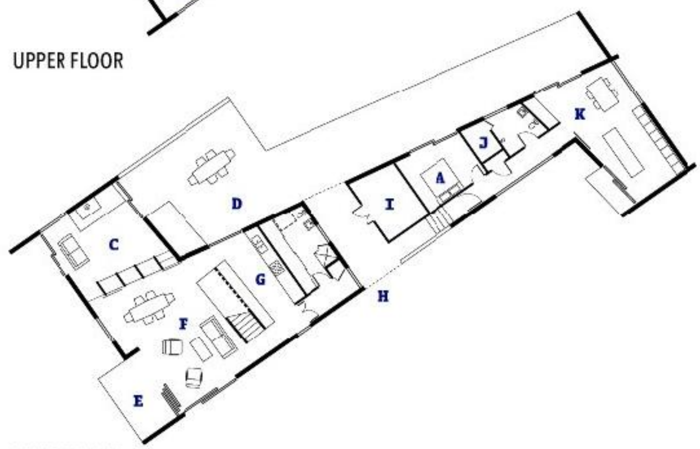
KERR-RITCHIE RESIDENCE

FLOOR PLANS

A Bedroom
B Yoga Studio
C Lounge
D Patio
E Deck
F Living/Dining Area
G Kitchen
H Entry
I Storage
J Sauna
K Studio



UPPER FLOOR



LOWER FLOOR



Linus, Archie, and Olive (below) relax on the home's cedar-lined front deck that opens off the main living area (right). The home is flanked on the east by a precipitous mountain range named The Remarkables. In summer, the weather gets hot enough for the family to go swimming and boating.





The location on the shores of a small bay means it is sheltered from cold southerly winds. The alpine location provided plenty of inspiration for landscaping, which Ritchie and Kerr elected to keep as minimal as possible, as if the home had landed on its site with as little disturbance or alteration as possible.



unsealed driveway and walk up a loose gravel path to the entrance.

Unlike most of the rest of New Zealand, which is known for its benign climate, Queenstown experiences some of the country's greatest temperature extremes. Winter days are regularly below freezing, but the mercury can rise into the 80s (Fahrenheit) in the summer. There is, however, still plenty of sun, so Kerr and Ritchie designed their home to retain as much solar heat in its concrete floors as possible. They also insulated the walls with batting made from recycled wool and specified double-glazed joinery for all the windows and doors. Solar panels and a backup boiler fueled by wood pellets—compressed waste from local timber mills—can pump hot water to warm the concrete floor when needed, although the family found that the home's thermal performance was so good they survived their first winter using only a single log burner. "It was a bit cold in the studio in the mornings," Kerr says, "but the bedrooms get a lot of sun and were always warm." On particularly frigid nights, the sauna provides relief.

A need to economize led to Kerr and Ritchie's choice of bold, simple building materials, but the robust palette feels appropriate in this tough environment. Corrugated concrete retaining walls—their pattern molded from the steel that clads the building—skirt parts of the home and work their way inside the studio and snug lounge.

Inside, tough materials are left behind in favor of more childlike interiors. "We wanted it to be a young person's house, sort of like a primary school," Kerr says. They opted not to grind the concrete floor, furnishing the lounge in bright-green carpet deliberately reminiscent of the 1970s, and chose "bold and cheerful" plastic lights and large-chipped strand board for the walls and doors.

Kerr and Ritchie have worked in partnership ever since Ritchie completed his landscape architecture degree, combining their skills to form a holistic design practice that they now deploy on a handful of projects each year. Their open-minded approach of fusing disciplines may explain why their own home sits so naturally on its site. While many of the oversize residences nearby look as if they landed with a tremendous thud, Kerr and Ritchie's home has touched down gently, enhancing the splendor of its surroundings.

Ace in the Home

The longer we looked for houses we love in Australia and New Zealand, the easier they were to find—until our folders, browsers, files, and eyes were wide open and full of them. The following seven projects—numbered by their position on our map (p. 74)—impressed us on every level. Too good to refuse, they're here to remind us of what a good house can be.

Fitzroy, Australia

4 Tattoo House
Andrew Maynard Architects
maynardarchitects.com



Photos by Peter Bennetts

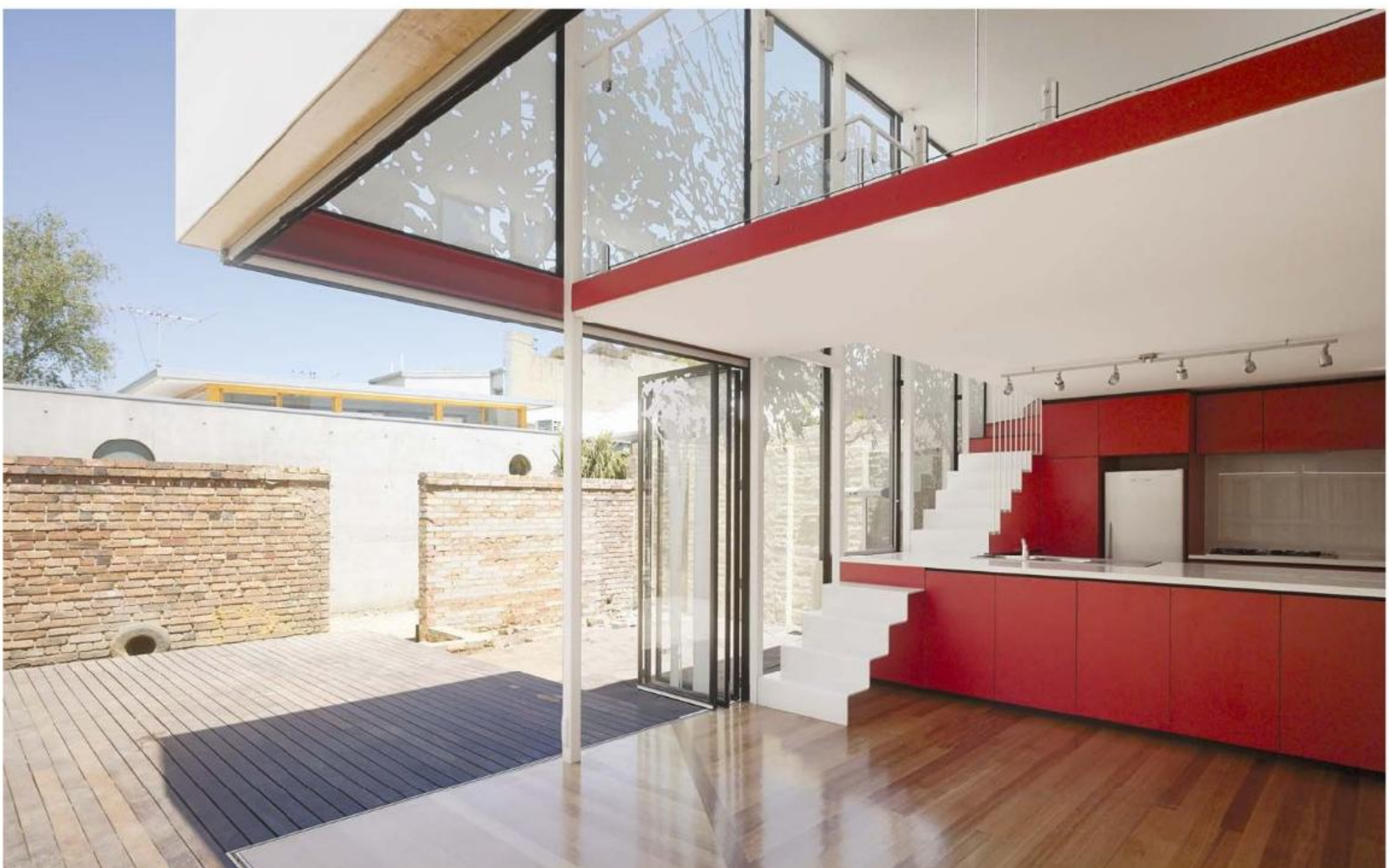


The best kind of privacy comes from being nestled behind leafy trees, where sunlight filters through to cast long, arboreal shadows. But not everyone is lucky enough to have a building site endowed with well-established trees. Fencing and blinds—or simply fewer windows—are the most obvious ways to block the eyes of strangers; but more creative solutions let the sun shine in without allowing too much visibility to the world at large.

One of Australia's most exciting young architects, Andrew Maynard, developed an unusual graphic strategy to bring the feeling of a wooded hideout to an exposed urban addition. His Tattoo House, an extension to an existing three-bedroom home in the Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy, is emblazoned with a giant decal. Not only does this bring the house into compliance with city requirements—that all homes have 75 percent opacity on the second floor—it also eliminates the need for screening. The window sticker even helped to save the tight construction budget, and it will keep costs down by reflecting glare, saving energy.

Though the tattoo makes the project appear elaborate, it's actually quite simple. The homeowners requested a light-filled living space and kitchen to accommodate their growing family—a challenge that Maynard solved with a basic box. The lower level is little more than a glass-enclosed deck, with bifold doors on two sides that slide away to open the kitchen. Once open, the upper level appears cantilevered over the yard, masked gently by the flat "trees" that adorn the windows.

Best of all, because the decals were based on photos taken at the local park, the silhouettes of the branches and leaves match those of the neighbors' trees over the fence. As the shadows and patterns change throughout the day, one could almost overlook the fact that the home's pleasant shade doesn't come from an actual canopy of greenery—but from a well-executed architectural trick of graphic design.
—Sarah Rich



Freshwater Beach, Australia

5 Freshwater House
Chenchow Little Architects
chenchowlittle.com

In a suburb ten miles northeast of Sydney, surfers with longboards tucked under their arms walk past a wall of weathered timber cladding on their way to Freshwater Beach, where American Duke Kahanamoku introduced surfing to the Aussies in 1914.

Behind the partition is the home of Stefan and Janelle Williams, owners of an Internet advertising firm and parents of two school-age children. The Williamses gave local architects Tony Chenchow and Stephanie Little just one request when they asked their firm to design the house in 2004: Create a modern home that would feel big despite the small lot on which it would be constructed. The result is a three-story open-plan building clad in floor-to-ceiling glass on three sides and sheltered—when desired—with a custom bifolding shutter system on the upper level. A two-car garage opens "like the Batcave," Stefan says, and the laundry and other utilitarian systems are hidden from view, which makes it possible to maintain a minimalist aesthetic.

While the glass walls suck in the sunlight, the black ceilings keep it tame. "With white ceilings, you have to wear sunglasses inside on bright days. You're never squinting in our house," Stefan says. The unusual overhead color choice enhances the already-spectacular ocean views. "It really frames the views. Everywhere you look it's like a postcard." ▸

—Miyoko Ohtake



Photo by John Gollings

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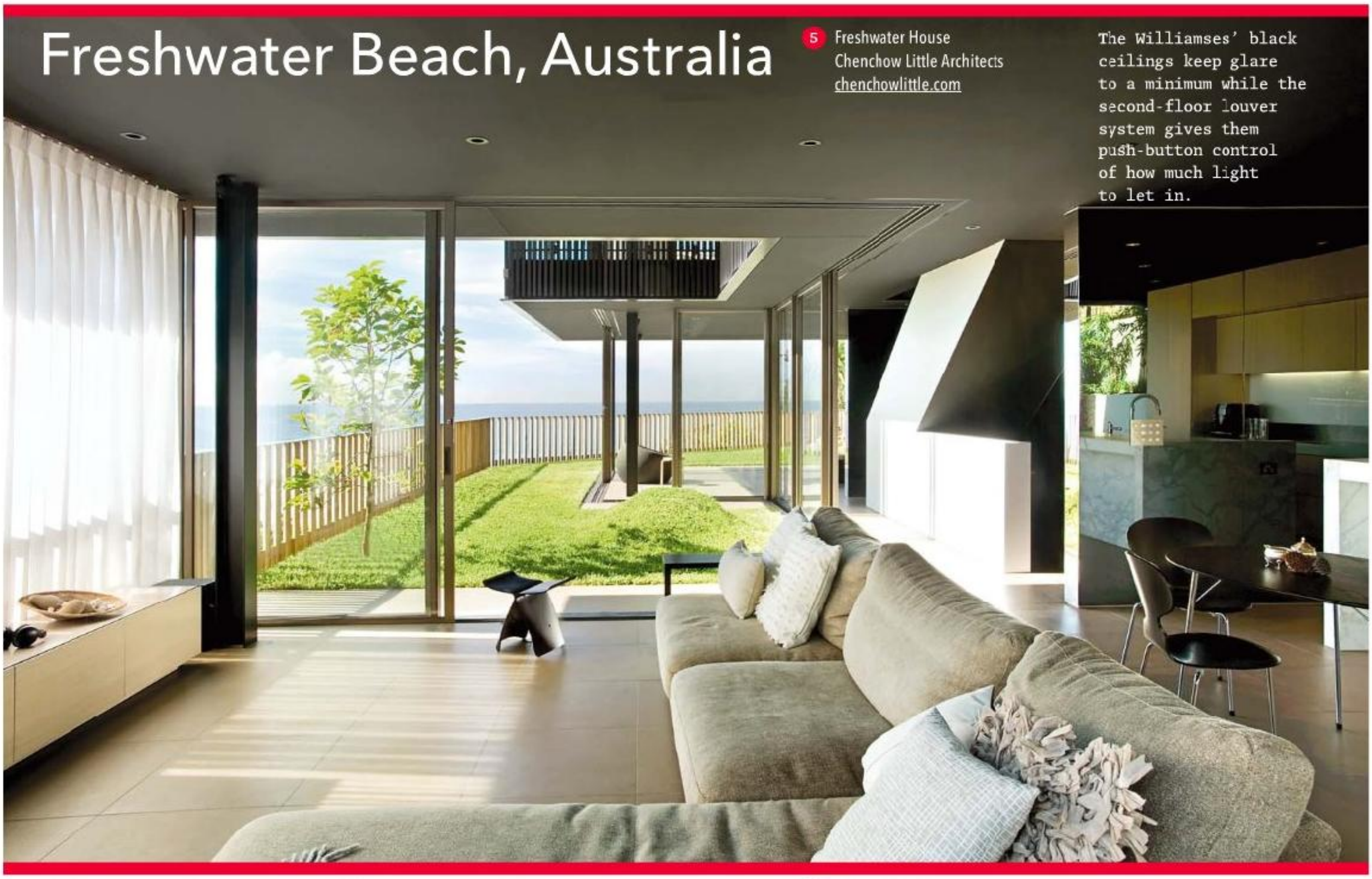
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Freshwater Beach, Australia

5 Freshwater House
Chenchow Little Architects
chenchowlittle.com



The Williamses' black ceilings keep glare to a minimum while the second-floor louver system gives them push-button control of how much light to let in.

Hawthorn, Australia

6 Narveno Court
McBride Charles Ryan
mcbridecharlesryan.com.au

Describing this unusual house in suburban Melbourne, McBride Charles Ryan architects write that it's as if "a sphere has been buried and eroded at either end." The result is a home whose form continually challenges the division between inside and out. Rooms have been extruded from the broken surface of the sphere to become "dispersed" balconies; the garden extends up into what should be an internal living area, bringing a small patch of cultivated wilderness into the domestic space; and the large, semicircular arms of the house's outer geometry reach around to form walls extending to the very edge of the site.
—**Geoff Manaugh**



Photos by John Gollings

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Tauranga, New Zealand

7 Norrish House
Herbst Architects
www.herbstarchitects.co.nz

New Zealand's Norrish House includes substantial outdoor deck space and a maze of doors that seamlessly connect inside and out.



Queanbeyan , Australia

8 Harwood Smith House
Dennis Formiatti Architect

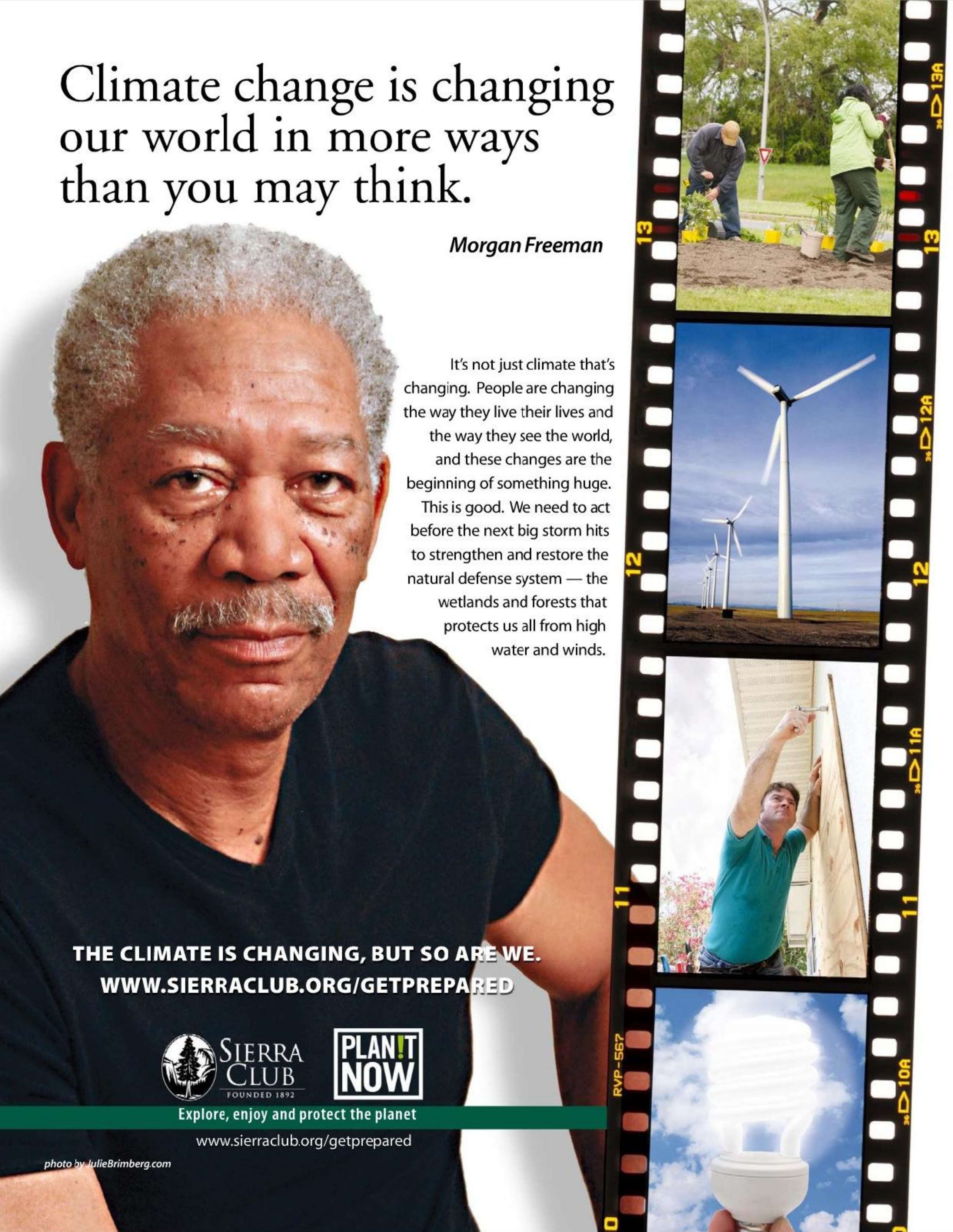






For the Harwood Smith House, architect Dennis Formiatti explains that he learns as much on the building site as he does in the studio. He was inspired by R. M. Schindler, he adds, who, later in his career, "did less on paper and more on construction sites."

Photos by Whit Preston (Norrish), Ben Wrigley (Harwood Smith)


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Auckland, New Zealand

9 Westmere House
Stevens Lawson Architects
stevenslawson.co.nz

Tucked into the narrow lanes and 19th-century pedigree of Westmere, a harborside inner suburb of Auckland, Stevens Lawson Architects' Westmere House renders all the hallmarks of its surroundings—timber-slat fences, bushy gardens, and a proper sense of place—in a thoroughly modern style. Gary Lawson sees his firm's work as utterly contextual. "The slatted screens and timber work have a resonance with the fine timber fences, balustrades, and details of the Victorian-era houses of the neighborhood," he says. He adds, referring to the elaborate woodwork, that "we have an interest in sculptural forms that elaborate on New Zealand's (and, indeed, the neighborhood's) timber house tradition. We see our response as a fusion of modernist forms with origami-like geometries."

Site sensitivity aside, what Lawson might be reluctant to say is that the Westmere House is a stunner. The cedar cladding is dark brown, a reference to Maori and other Pacific island carvings, but the slats also give the house a permeable feeling. This undercuts what in hands less skilled might have been an imposing mass—Darth Vader's beach house.

Dark though it may seem, the house is equally enamored with another hue: green. Making use of solar-heated hot water, recycled rainwater for the toilets and laundry, and passive solar and ventilation, the Westmere House represents an ethos of sustainability that even traditionally minded neighbors can get behind.

—Aaron Britt



Photo by Mark Smith

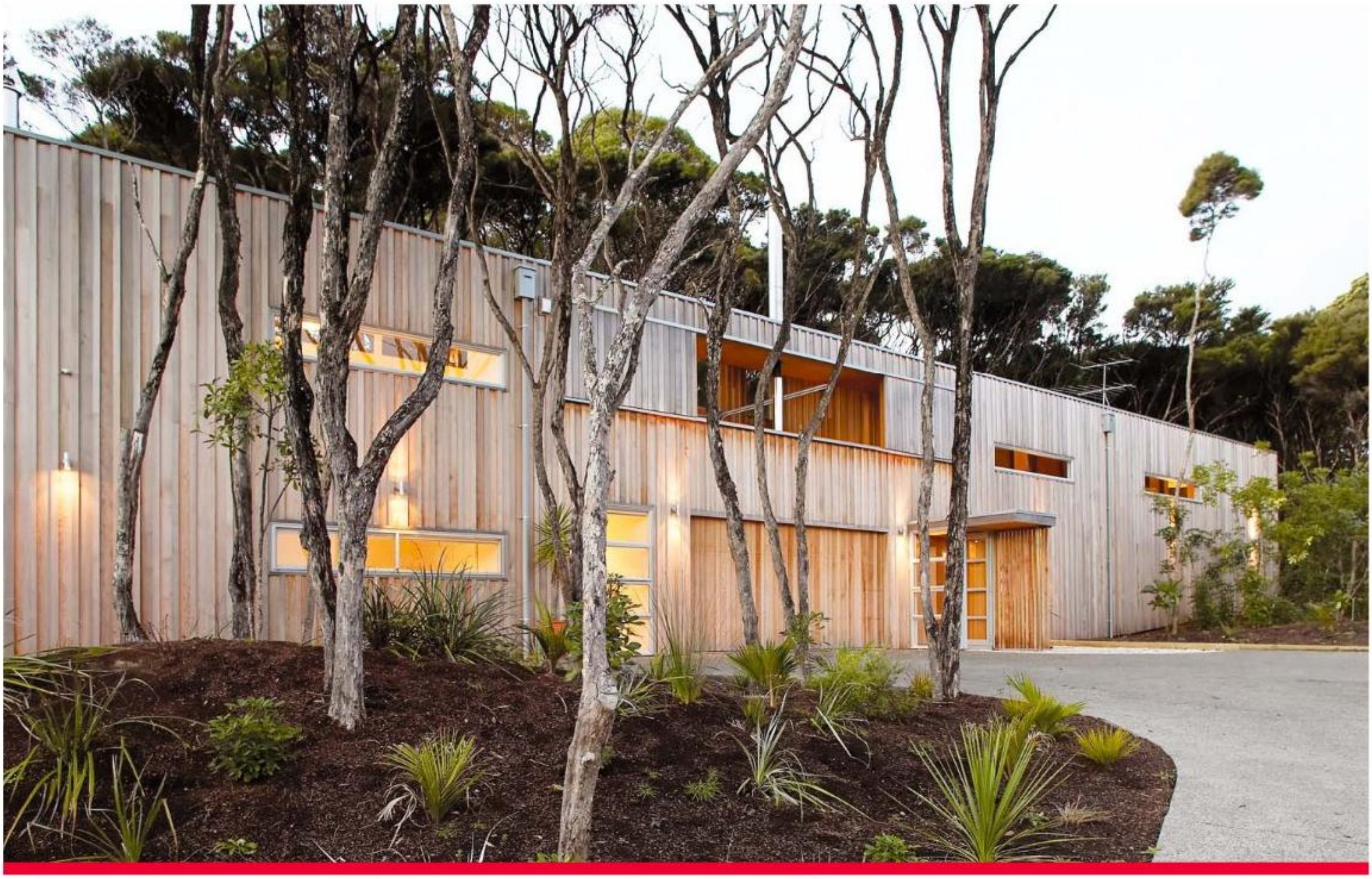
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Mangawhai, New Zealand

10 The Point House
Strachan Group Architects
sgaltd.co.nz

The Point House by New Zealand's Strachan Group Architects sits beside a sand bank two hours north by car from Auckland. The house is less a building, however, than a kind of inland pier. Indeed, the architects describe the project as a "narrow jetty structure"—an anchored platform surrounded by Kanuka tea trees—that they've simply "inserted" into the ecologically fragile coastal landscape. In tandem with an elevated strip of decks and terraces, this helped the project avoid becoming just another bruise on the land.

Throughout their residential design work—including the Gullwing, a modular housing prototype—the architects have proven themselves fluent in the use of climatically appropriate moving walls and panels. The Point House is no exception, cleverly incorporating sliding doors and shutters across its southern exposure. These allow the house's appearance to be in a near-constant state of alteration. At their most basic level, these insulating shutters can be moved back and forth to block the winds, acting as ventilation flues—but the weathered cedar planks also become a mobile texture that, while certainly eye-catching, work paradoxically to help the project blend into its site.

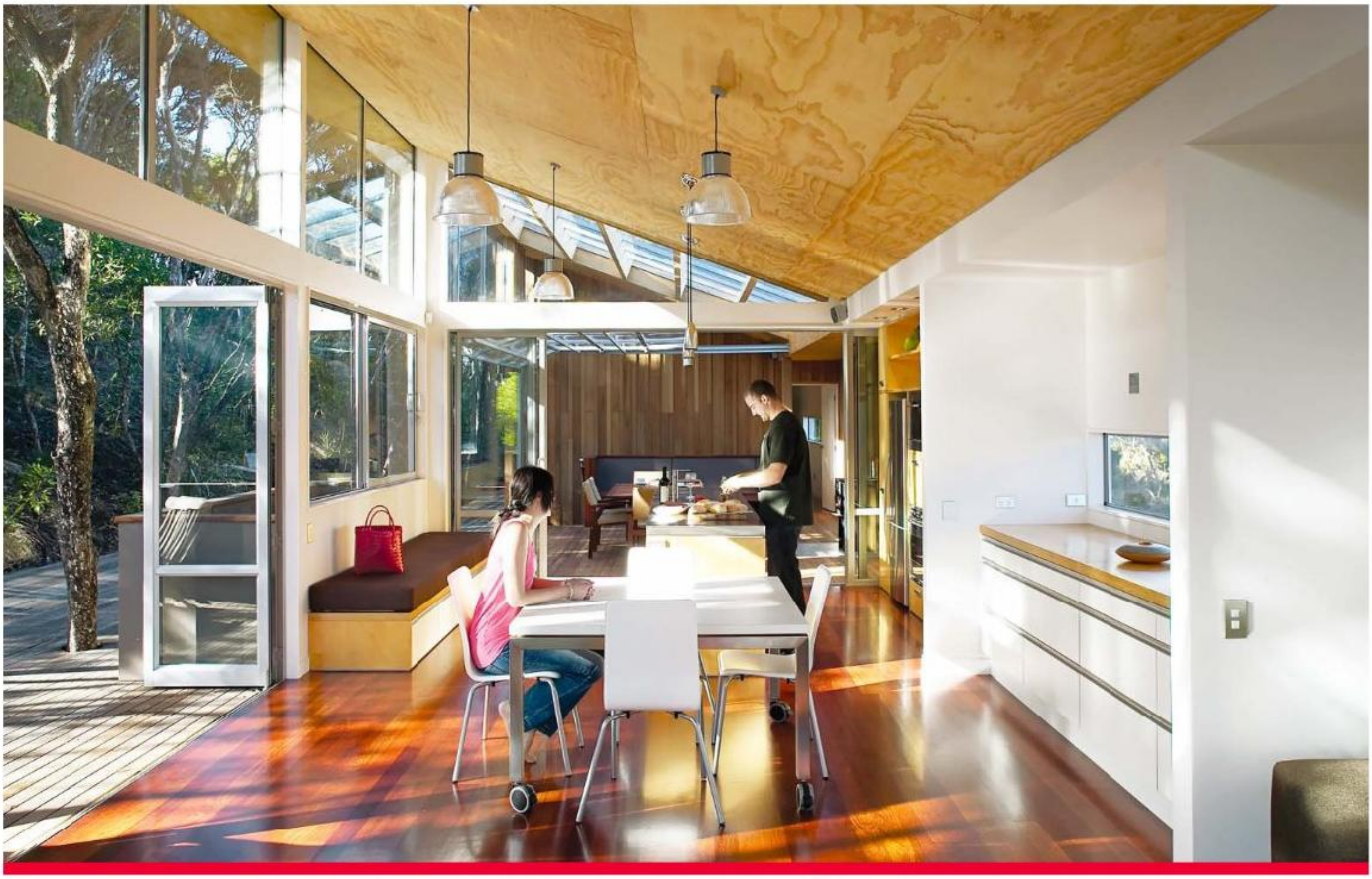
The exposed northern facade is a sweep of fixed windows and sliding glass doors. Together, these allow views of the natural landscape as well as access to the warmth of daytime sunlight. It is also here that the house becomes most interesting. An outdoor deck leads directly into the living space—somewhere between family room and inhabited breezeway—sheltered beneath a skylight. Should the winter winds kick up, a sectional garage door with acrylic sheet paneling can be tracked down as a buffer.

With its multiple decks and shutters, the Point House is like a physics problem in architectural form: At any given point, it is open, closed, inside, outside, and all states in between.

—Geoff Manaugh



Photos by Patrick Reynolds



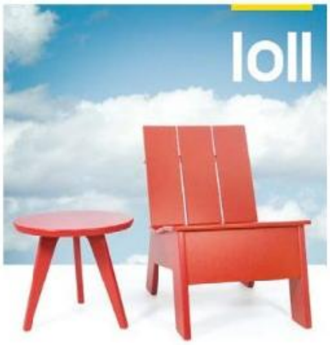
Mangawhai, New Zealand

10 The Point House
Strachan Group Architects
sgaltd.co.nz



The interior of the Point House flips and slides open at almost every point, from bifolds to overhead garage doors, with moving shutters and sunscreens on all the walls between. A generously spaced home with a surprisingly small footprint, the house stands amidst dunes and tea trees near the constant thrum of the New Zealand beach.

Photos by Patrick Reynolds



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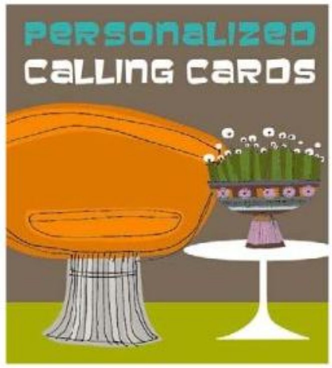
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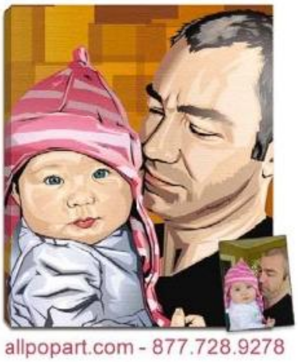
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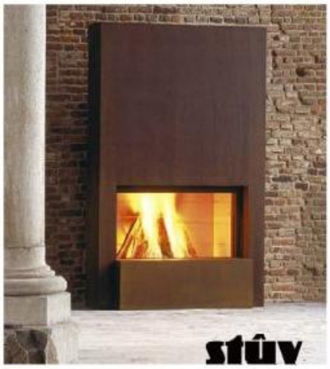
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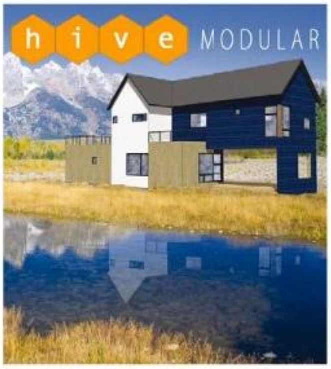
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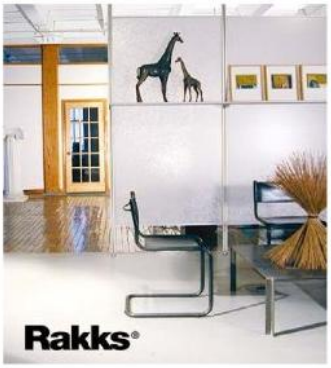
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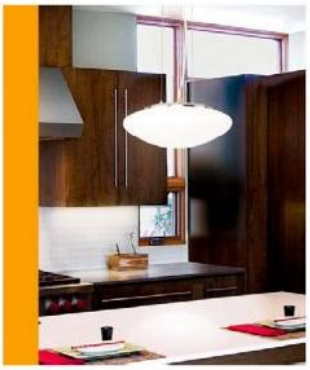
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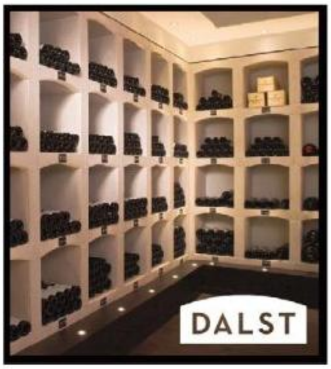
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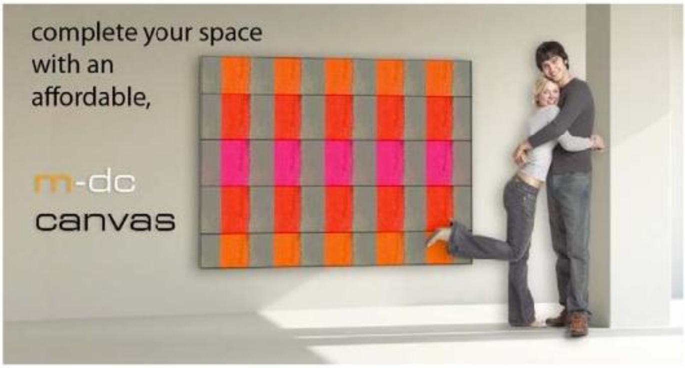


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60 Off the Grid

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66 Dwell Reports

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MVS chaise by Maarten Van Severen for Vitra
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Veneto stackable chaise longue by Unopiu for Design Within Reach
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70 Conversation

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74 Learning from Down Under

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86 A Measured Approach

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Lanka outdoor chairs by Jouko Järvisalo for Mobel
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94 Nature Nurtured

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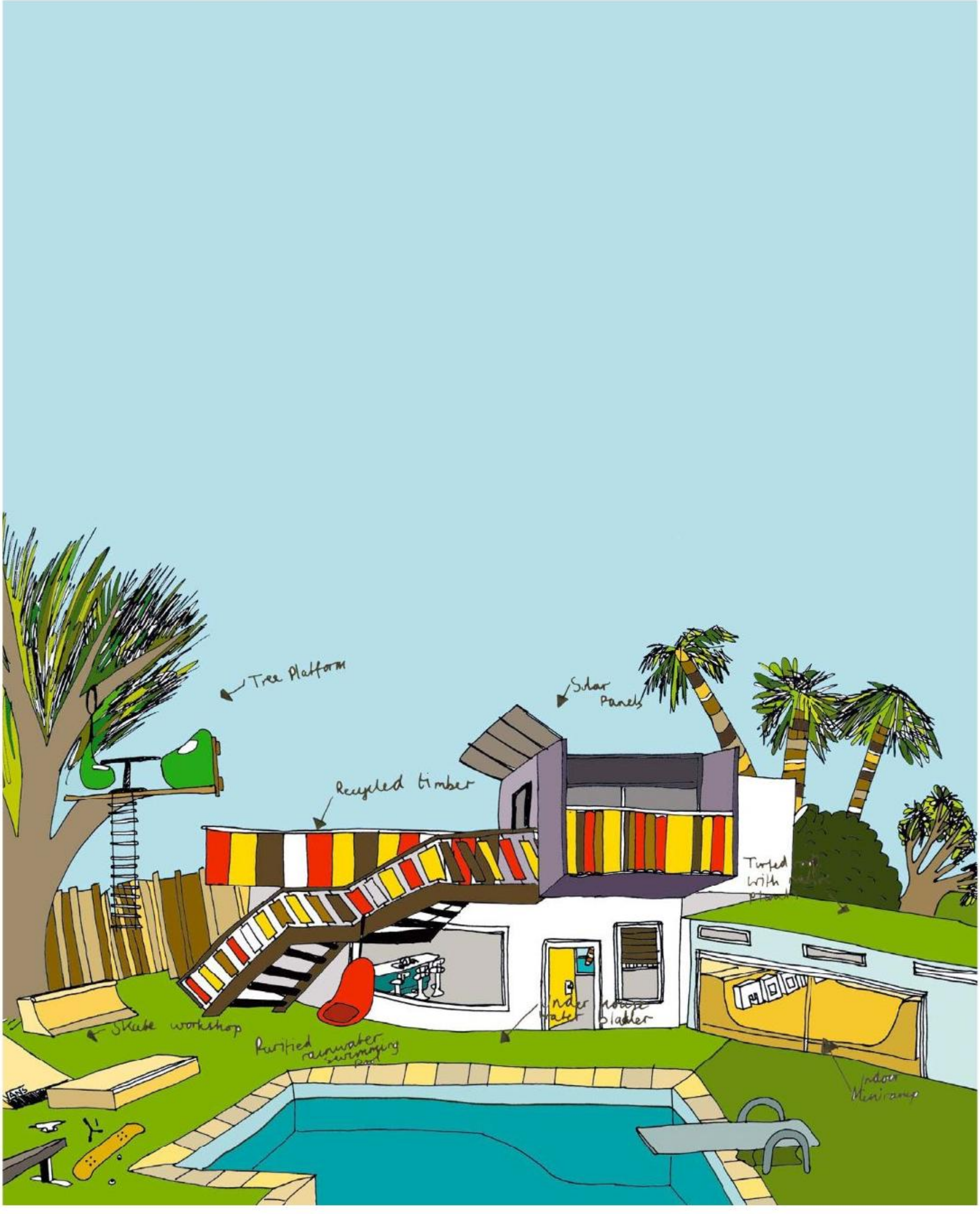
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After stumbling upon the architecturally inspired artwork of 11-year-old Moofus on the Etsy website (etsy.com), we tapped the young Aussie to create this month's Theme Attic during his summer vacation. Moofus's Australian dream house would be built entirely out of salvaged materials and would include solar panels, rainwater collection tanks, and a grass-covered roof for chickens to graze on.





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